

DICK DOOM'S SHADOW HUNT!



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THE GENTLEMAN CROOK IN CHICAGO.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.



FOR ONCE DICK DOOM, THE FAMOUS DETECTIVE, HAD BEEN CAUGHT OFF HIS GUARD, AND HE WAS CERTAINLY IN DANGEROUS HANDS.

The Gentleman Crook in Chicago;
OR,
Nick Norcross, the River Rat.
DICK DOOM'S SHADOW HUNT.
BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.**MURDER OR SUICIDE.**

ALONG Michigan avenue, in the great City of Chicago, a man was strolling leisurely, though the hour was past midnight.

He seemed to be enjoying the view of the long line of street lamps stretching away upon either hand, and the glimmer of lights in the windows of the hotels and residences facing upon the popular thoroughfare.

Turning off of the avenue he crossed the green sward and walked out upon a pier jutting some distance into the lake.

Standing there, gazing out upon the waters, and listening to the wash of the waves against the pier, he started as he suddenly heard a voice far out upon the lake, and it was raised in a cry for help.

He could not pierce the blackness ahead, and so what caused that cry was shut out of sight from him; but though faintly heard, again and again came the piteous appeal:

"Help! Help! I am being murdered!"

And the cry was in a woman's voice!

The one who, standing there alone in the darkness, an hour after midnight, heard that pleading cry, stood like one dazed.

Behind him was all the brightness of the city; before him was all the blackness of night upon the lake.

And that blackness was hiding some deed from all eyes but those who were out there upon the waters.

The cries ceased and nothing more was heard, save the snarl of the waves.

Stillness that was ominous rested out upon the waters, while behind, the rumble of belated vehicles and the busy hum of a city not yet in slumber was heard.

At last the man spoke, and his words were:

"Some crime has been committed out yonder this night, and it was a woman who was murdered."

"Oh! that I could pierce the darkness and see who had done the deed!"

"I will wait here and search the waters for an incoming boat, for surely whoever rowed out on the lake to do the deed, will return to the city."

"I will watch and wait, for I can sleep on the train to-morrow, and before I go I will report what I heard to the chief of police."

And there through the night stood the man, watching and waiting, his eyes straining over the waters in search of an incoming boat.

But, no boat came into view, and the hours dragged slowly by until the dawn came.

Out over the waters now intently gazed the stranger.

The morning was calm, the lake was as placid as a mill-pond, but its bosom revealed nothing of the deed done under cover of the darkness.

Going to a hotel near by the stranger wrote a few lines, addressing them to the Chief of Police of Chicago.

Then he went to his room in the hotel, paid his bill and started for the station and was soon after being whirled away outward at a rapid rate in an Express train.

The next morning he purchased a paper on the train and glancing over it his eyes fell upon the following in the telegraph dispatches from Chicago:

A BEAUTIFUL SUICIDE.

"A startling discovery was made at the home of Mr. Dunstan Marlborough this morning, and one that is sad in the extreme.

"Upon looking out of the window this morning Mrs. Marlborough discovered a small boat upon the shore, for the grounds of the millionaire's home reach down to the waters of the lake.

"In the boat lay the form of a woman, and giving the alarm to her husband, Mr. Marlborough hastened to the shore and made a very startling discovery.

"In the boat lay the form of a young and beautiful girl, her hands peacefully folded upon her breast, and one of them grasping a note.

"Taking the note from the lifeless hand, Mr. Marlborough read:

"I take my own life, and I alone am to blame." —ESTELLE ENDERS.

"A bottle of chloroform lay in the boat, and a handkerchief that had been saturated with the drug; and that was all to betray the mode of death.

"The body was richly dressed, and the watch, earrings and finger-rings, all of considerable value, were undisturbed, while in a purse in her pocket was a considerable sum of money, showing that it had been a pure and simple case of suicide, not one of murder and robbery.

"But, who is Estelle Enders is the question, for it seems that no one knows, while the cause of her taking her own life, young, beautiful, and certainly not in need, no one can understand, though naturally it is supposed to be a case of misplaced affection or unrequited love.

"A hint that it might have been a murder is ridiculed by the police, who assert that the girl took her own life."

Such was the article that the stranger read, and when he had finished it he said to himself:

"I differ with the police, for I believe that Estelle Enders, whoever she may be, was murdered, and that it was her cry for help I heard out on the waters of the lake last night!"

CHAPTER II.**THE RIVER FERRETS.**

UPON the banks of the Chicago River, in one of the worst portions of the World's Fair city, and hiding away among a pile of boxes, sat a number of boys, on the morning after the discovery of the body of Estelle Enders, the beautiful young suicide.

The boys were of a class known as "young toughs," and though their attire was of various kinds and colors, each one of them wore a gray slouch hat, around which was a red cord.

To all appearances the youths were newsboys, bootblacks or idlers, and all but one were indulging in a cigarette, or cigar.

One of the band lay at length upon the top of a large box, and was evidently there as a lookout, for he kept his eyes roving up and down the wharves, as though in search of a policeman.

Tied to the wharf where they were was a small row-boat, and it was convenient should they be forced to make a speedy retreat from some cause or other.

There were in the band just thirteen, and that they were allied for some purpose, good or bad, there was not the slightest doubt.

The one who was not smoking looked to be of a better class than his companions, was better dressed and appeared to be intelligent beyond his years.

His face was a handsome one, and his manners were really refined.

"Well, fellers," he said, as the band gathered about him, "I called this meeting of our River Ferrets, to read you something I saw in the papers yesterday morning, and to tell you that I want you to help me find out if it was a case of murder or suicide, and just who the lady is, for there undoubtedly are people who love her and would like to know where her grave is."

"Does yer mean the gal as was found dead in the boat, Nick?" asked one.

"Yes, Miss Estelle Enders."

"What about her, Nick?"

"Well, just this.

"You remember I got knocked down a year ago and hurt by a truck, when I was trying to save a little girl from being run over?"

"Yes, you saved the gal, but got a broken arm for your pains."

"That was all right; but a lady who saw me go down called a hack and drove me to the hospital, and left money with the doctor for me."

"I remember."

"Now, all I could find out about her was that the doctor told me she gave her name as Estelle Enders, and I do know that she came to see how I was several times, and she was a very beautiful girl."

"When I saw that a lady by that name had taken her own life, I went to the undertaker's and I'll tell you, fellers, it was my good friend, and I felt mighty bad over it."

"But, my idea is that those who love her ought to know where she is buried, and I want to see if we cannot find out just who she was, for she was put in the grave this morning, through the kindness of the gent on whose grounds the boat drifted, and not a soul knew her, and yet she must have kin-folks somewhere."

"Well, Nick, as you got us to band together, to try and make a little money in Secret Service work, though the police is ag'in' us, and suspects us of being thieves, I says your word goes and we'll see if we can't find out who ther pretty lady was for you," said one.

"I says the same."

"And me!"

"Me too."

And so the words went the rounds until all had decided to go on the trail of the mystery.

"I thank you, fellers, and let me tell you that I don't believe that young lady took her own life."

"You thinks she was murdered, Nick?"

"I don't see why a girl who was so beautiful and was not in want, would kill herself, and if she did, why she would go out alone in a boat on the lake at night to do it."

"That's so, Nick."

"Anyhow we must try what we can find out about her, so must watch the papers, see what the police say, and just go in to win."

"I'll be here to-morrow just at this time, so meet me here then, all of you."

"The meeting is adjourned and just in time, for there goes Trump's note of warning," and a low whistle was heard from the sentinel on the box.

Instantly there was a scattering, three of the band dropping into the boat and rowing away, two of them walking boldly out up the wharves, several going in the opposite direction and the balance hiding among the boxes.

Among those who walked boldly out of the hiding-place was the leader of the band, and who was known as Nick Norcross.

CHAPTER III.**NICK'S RESOLVE.**

Two policemen were coming toward the scene of the meeting, but Nick did not make any effort to avoid them.

"Say, young feller, what has you boys been up to down yonder?" demanded one of the officers, grasping the youth by the shoulder.

"We were having a little talk and doing no harm, cop."

"I believes yer lies, and I has a great mind ter run yer in, see?"

"I see that you are always ready to arrest an innocent boy, while you let guilty men escape," was the bold response of the boy.

"In you goes, yer sassy brat," cried the officer, and he started away with the lad while his companion walked on toward the scene of the meeting of t... young ferrets.

"See here, officer; I haven't done anything to be locked up for, and I don't want to go to jail, so take a fiver and let me off and I'll be your friend."

"Has you got ther five?"

"I have."

"Well, it's about what the judge would make you put up, so give it to me and git."

"But, remember I has my eyes on you, young feller."

"I wont forget, cop," and handing over the five-dollar bill the youth hastened on after his companions.

But they had skipped when they saw him in the grasp of the officer, and springing upon a car Nick rode out to the hospital and asked to see the doctor in charge, who had so kindly cared for him when he had a broken leg.

"Well, Nick, you are not here as a patient again, I hope?" said the doctor.

"No, indeed, sir; I'm all right; but I came to ask you if you could give me any information about that young lady who was so good to me?"

"No, Nick, I've even forgotten her name."

"It was Miss Estelle Enders, sir."

"Yes, that was it, and—ha! now I recall where it was that I heard the name before when I saw the account in the papers of a young lady committing suicide two days ago, who signed her name Estelle Enders."

"Yes, sir, and I wish you could tell me something about her."

"I know nothing, Nick, only that she brought you here and gave me money to see that you wanted for nothing, while she said that her name was Estelle Enders."

"You do not know whether she lived in Chicago, or not, sir?"

"No, but I have an idea that she was an actress, from a simple remark that she made to me."

"What was that, sir?"

"She told me that she could not come again to the hospital to see you, as she had to start away upon a professional engagement, but when she came again to the city she would call and see if I had been to any additional expense for you and would pay the bill."

"Bless her good heart, sir! and now she is dead, poor lady!"

"But, good-by, doctor, for I must be off," and Nick left the hospital wondering what would be his next move to find out something of the dead girl's past life.

At last the idea struck him to go to the home of Mr. Marlborough and boldly ask to see the boat she had been found dead in.

So to the millionaire's home he went, and, as both Mr. and Mrs. Marlborough were away from home, a two-dollar bill won the friendship of the coachman, and he showed him the boat, which no one had been to claim, and told him all he could of the story of the finding of the fair suicide.

Nick was a good questioner, and got all the information he could from the coachman, who had been the one to take the body from the boat.

He asked him about the jewelry she wore, and many other questions, and then wanted to know if he thought Mr. Marlborough would sell the boat.

"No, he dare not, young fellow, for he's got to keep it in case any one comes to claim it," was the answer.

Nick took the situation all in, and thanking the coachman, left the grounds.

But after getting a short distance away he stopped, and regarding the lake-shore and position of the boat attentively, muttered to himself:

"I must have that boat, and I will!

"Yes, I'll get Pete to come with me tonight, and as I can't buy it, I'll just sneak

it, for it may be a clue to what I am determined to find out."

With this he started upon his return to the city to look up his side-pard, Pete Pepper.

CHAPTER IV.

THE YOUNG PLOTTERS.

NICK NORCROSS went to what he was pleased to call his home.

It was a room in a rickety building in an alley near the river, and two cots and a couple of chairs, with a tin basin and pitcher, constituted the furniture visible.

If there was anything else, in the way of furnishing or wardrobe, it was not visible.

But in spite of its poverty, the room was neatly kept, and having shut the door and locked it, Nick drew aside one of the cots, and taking hold of a ring in the floor, raised a long, narrow trap-door.

A stair-case was visible there, leading to a room on the floor below, and in this room were evidences of more comfort for the occupants, for there were several easy-chairs, a table, writing-desk, and a couple of trunks, also shelves against the wall.

There was a door leading out into a small flower garden, and a couple of windows, but the blinds were kept closed and the room, but for a lighted lamp, was in darkness.

Seating himself in one of the chairs Nick began to meditate as he rocked to and fro, and was thus engaged when he heard a knock at the door of the room at the head of the stairs.

He hastily went up to the room, closed the trap, replaced the cot and opening the door, when the knock was repeated, found there his room-mate and particular pard, Pete Pepper.

"I know'd yer was in, Nick, as my key wouldn't unlock the door."

"Yes, I was waiting for you to come, Pete, though I didn't expect you before night."

"I got clear of the cops and so came home, thinking you'd be here."

"And I want you, Peter."

"I'm with yer, Nick," was the prompt response.

"I know that, old fellow, for you are true as steel."

"Why should I be, Nick, when I owe my life to you?"

"I tell you, I think as much of you almost as I did my poor mother who died three years ago."

"When she left me then it seemed I couldn't control ther devil in my natur' and I went to the bad."

"You was brought up different from me, for I knows, as well as the rest of the boys, that you was born rich and raised on a silver mug, for your talk and actions hain't like ther rest of us."

"Yes, Nick, I is your pal, and don't you forgit it, so shout out what yer wishes me ter do and I'll do it, if it's ter strangle a cop," and the boy dashed his hand across his eyes as though he had recalled recollections that caused him to feel deeply.

Nick Norcross stretched forth his hand and grasped that of the other youth, while he said feelingly:

"Yes, Pete, I was well born, and yet today I am on a level with those who had not my advantages."

"It may be all my fault, and maybe not, but we won't speak of that, now, for we have work to do."

"What is it?"

"Well, it is not to strangle a cop, as you put it, Pete, but to steal a boat."

"We do want another boat, Nick, for our use."

"No, not that, for this one is to go in hiding as I need to find out who its maker was, and then we can get at the one who purchased it, for as that dear young lady was found dead in it, somehow I think her murderer can be traced by it."

"You will think she was murdered, Nick?"

"Yes, I can't get the idea out of my head; but, listen to my plan."

"Yes, Nick."

"There is an old shanty up near the lake-shore which is deserted."

"I knows it."

"We can have the boys to meet us at night, and you and I can get the boat and take it there."

"I see."

"Then all of us can lift it out and hide it in the loft of that old shanty."

"We can."

"Once it is there we can find the maker of it, and then the one who bought it from him, for it is a new boat."

"We'll track him, Nick."

"Well, go and post all the boys you can find of our band, and tell them to be on hand, but to go to the shanty one at a time."

"I'll do it."

"Then meet me at the river to-night where our boat Number One is kept."

"At what time, Nick?"

"Say about nine o'clock."

"I'll be there, sure."

Then the two boys parted, after making a few other arrangements for their night's work, which both knew would be attended with great danger.

CHAPTER V.

THE YOUNG MARAUDERS.

At the appointed hour Pete Pepper met Nick Norcross at the rendezvous, and reported to him that the boys had been posted as to what they were to do, and all was ready for the midnight marauding expedition.

Going to the dock, where a number of boats were kept for hire, the two youths got the oars from the boatman and entering one of the small craft pulled rapidly out into the lake.

They were fine oarsmen, and pulled a strong, rapid stroke which sent the boat along at a pace of over four mile an hour.

The lights of the city were on their starboard side, and some distance away, for they wished to keep well out of sight.

Without a rest upon the oars they held on for an hour and a half, and were far away from the busy part of the city, so they turned the bow shoreward.

As they drew near the shore they rested on their oars and glancing behind them Nick said:

"Do you see those lights there, Pete?"

"I does."

"Well, they are in the Marlborough mansion."

"And the boat is there?"

"Yes, drawn up on the lawn about ten feet from the water."

"And how far from the house?"

"About two hundred feet, and half that distance from the stables."

"We must row in mighty quiet, Nick."

"We will not row in."

"How'll we git thar?"

"Swim!"

"Lordy!"

"Why, Pete, you are surely not afraid, when you are such a splendid swimmer?"

"I hain'tafeerd of the swim, Dick, but if we is run in we'll look kinder cool dressed without any clothes."

"We must not be caught, Pete."

"That's so."

"Now, what's to be done?"

"We are about a hundred and fifty yards from the shore."

"Just about."

"Well, we'll anchor our boat, then undress and swim ashore."

"I brought these sawed off oar-handles as rollers; so you can take one and I the other, and as the boat has no painter, here is rope for one. The boat's oars are in the barn, so

when we strike water we must paddle her out here and take her in tow."

"You is captain, Nick, and I the crew, so give your orders."

"Well, undress now and slip into the water without a splash."

The anchor was then let down and the two youths began to undress in silence, the boat rocking lightly upon the waves which a light wind from the lake sent shoreward.

Slipping into the water noiselessly, they placed the rollers under their breasts as a kind of a buoy and started shoreward with easy strokes, Nick carrying a coil of rope about his neck.

They had quite a long swim of it, but little they cared as they were splendid swimmers, and dreaded the land much more than they did the lake.

As they neared the shore they saw the lights go out in the mansion, and darkness reigned upon all.

There was a bulkhead upon the grounds, protecting the shore, and around this they swam, and the water being deep just there up to the very lawn, they continued swimming until they reached the beach almost.

Then they paused to rest and reconnoiter.

As they did so Nick Norcross placed his hand upon the shoulder of Pete Pepper.

The other was at once on the alert and whispered:

"What is it?"

Nick silently pointed to the shore, and there through the darkness, was seen the outline of the boat lying keel up on the lawn, and beside it stood the form of a man!

The boys hardly breathed in their suspense, and watched the shore with the deepest attention, for they saw the man move slowly about the boat.

As they watched they saw him bend over one end of the boat, and as he half rose it was discovered that he was moving the bow slowly around by an effort of his strength, which was great, to do what he did.

Then he went to the stern and lifted it even with the bow.

"Pete?"

"Yes, Nick."

"That fellow is stealing the boat," whispered Nick, his lips close to Pete's ear.

"Sure."

By the process of moving the bow, then the stern, the man was getting the boat nearer and nearer to the water, and he was doing his work well and silently.

Nick saw that the boat had been moved further up on the lawn since he had seen it, and that this solitary thief would have to bring it at least fifty feet before he got it into the water.

"He is saving us trouble, Pete."

"Yes, if we can get it from him."

"We must, or at least will see where he takes it and know who he is and why he is stealing the boat."

"I'm with you, Nick."

"Then, when he reaches the water with it, we will call a halt and capture him."

"Good! only I don't feel very brave tacklin' a fellow in my undress uniform, Nick."

"We can do nothing else, Pete, so be ready."

"I'm with yer," was the response of Pete Pepper, and he meant what he said.

CHAPTER VI.

A DEATH-STRUGGLE.

THE two boy pals in the water up to their necks, remained watching the silent worker ashore with the deepest interest allied with suspense as to what the outcome would be.

Standing in water was not conducive to keeping the nerves cool when the body was cold; but though shivering as with a chill, the two youths remained at their post awaiting the result of their adventure.

The man who was so silently and successfully stealing the boat, showed that he pos-

sessed a strength far above the average, and he was seen to have almost a giant frame.

For two youths, strong though they might be, to measure their strength with his would be dangerous in the extreme, and yet though they knew the risk they did not shrink from the ordeal, though Pete Pepper several times whispered: "Oh! if I only had my clothes on."

At last the man got the bow of the boat to the edge of the water, and going to the stern he made another lift.

This enabled him to next lift the bow well into the water, when he went to the stern, raised it and thus shoved the boat into the lake.

He held one foot in it, to keep it from drifting away, while he tied a rope in it and made it fast to a tree.

Then he glided silently away toward the stables.

"Now is our chance, Nick," cried Pete eagerly.

"What for?"

"To cut and run off with the boat."

"No."

"Why not?"

"It will not tell us *who that man is*."

"What do you want to know fer, if yer gits ther boat?"

"I wish to know why he wants the boat and who he is."

"I see."

"He is not stealing this boat without a greater motive than simply to get possession of it for its value."

"I guess he hain't."

"He has gone to the stable now to get the oars."

"May be he's the coachman?"

"No; he is too large a man for the coachman, whom you remember I saw."

"Yes; but he seems ter know the grounds and place."

"That may be because he has studied them as I did."

"Then you say tackle him on his way back?"

"Yes."

"I only wish I was dressed," whined Pete, and Nick laughed.

But his laughter was checked by a sound that came from the stable.

It was a stifled cry, a groan and a blow.

"There's something going on wrong there, Pete."

"Sure."

"There comes our man."

As Nick spoke a man came out of the stable at a run.

"He's got the oars," said Pete, in a whisper.

The man came directly toward the spot where the two youths stood by the boat. He was running, while he carried the oars upon his shoulder.

Suddenly Nick faced him, and just as he did so, the man had discovered him and shrunk back.

"Curse you! don't bar my way or I'll treat you as I did that coachman!" was the savagely uttered threat in suppressed tones, and throwing the oars upon the lawn, he drew a knife and sprung toward Nick Norcross.

Pete Pepper uttered a cry of terror, and ran toward his friend, but Nick Norcross held in his hands the end of the oar he had sawed off, and brought along as a roller, and with this he defended himself, for with a swing in the air he brought it down upon the head of his assailant.

He was not a moment too soon, for the man, with a long-bladed, ugly knife upraised, would have been upon him in a second more, and wielded by a hand so powerful, Nick Norcross would then and there have lost his life.

But under the boy's blow the night prowler fell his length upon the lawn, and lay as motionless as though dead.

"Oh, Nick!" gasped Pete. "Come! we must get out of this!"

"Into the boat, with the oars, Pete, while I untie the painter!"

Nick's courage arose with the situation, and he spoke with the utmost calmness, while he hastily sprung to the tree, untied the rope the man had made fast there a few minutes before, and sprung into the boat by the side of his comrade, who had the oars in the rowlocks.

"No; we must paddle out, Pete, for the house has not been alarmed, and the sound of oars would be heard," and Nick Norcross stood in the stern and used his oar for a scull, sending the boat slowly out from the shore.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEATH SECRET.

THE two youths soon had the little boat in tow of their own craft, and were pulling with strong stroke back along the shore, keeping well out.

The roar of the city came to their ears, for Chicago never wholly goes to sleep even after midnight, and the long lines of lights guided them on their way.

Both were silent, for they were busy with their own thoughts and were too hard at work to enter into conversation.

At last they got down opposite the busiest part of the city and passed vessels going in and out, one or two of them steamers, others sailing-craft.

They were fearful of being hailed and caught by the police, having a boat in tow as they did, for it was natural that they might be suspected of having stolen it.

But they gave the crafts they met as wide a berth as possible and held on up along the shore for the rendezvous with their comrades near the old rookery where they were to put the stolen boat in hiding.

At last Nick turned and glanced shoreward, and he spoke for the first time since leaving the house of the millionaire.

"Pete!"

He started as he heard how husky his voice had grown, and there was a choking sensation in his throat.

After an effort Pete replied, for he, too, felt the same way, his throat and lips being dry, his voice hoarse.

"Yes, Nick."

"We'll run in now, and we must tell the boys."

"Why tell 'em, Nick?"

"We must act square with them, Pete, as we are pledged to do."

"Well?"

"If we did not they would know of the affair to-morrow, Pete, and be certain we did it, while they would feel that we had not trusted them."

"Nick."

"Yes."

"Do you think *he is dead?*" whispered Pete.

"Yes."

"What makes you think so?"

"I only intended to stun him, and yet, seeing my deathly danger, I brought the oar down upon his head with terrible force, Pete."

"And you think the blow proved fatal?"

"Yes, though I hope not."

"Why don't you think it stunned him?"

"I'll tell you why, Pete and then do not let us talk of it—I heard the cracking of the bone under the blow, Pete," and Nick pulled at once on his oars once more and Pete remained silent.

They approached the shore carefully, but were reassured by hearing the well-known signal of their band, and then pulled boldly in.

Their fellows were all there, save one stationed off at some distance to give a note of alarm should any one be approaching the deserted house.

"You got the boat, pard?" said a voice eagerly as they reached the beach.

"Yes, and all together get a grip and we'll carry it to a hiding-place," answered Nick.

The strong arms of the lads raised the boat from the water, and it was carried into the old building and stowed away in the garret, where it was hidden under a pile of straw, a dark lantern furnishing the light to guide them.

"Now, pards, I want you to come to the beach, for I wish to speak to you before we part."

"Some of us can go back by our boat, and the others overland, but I have a secret to tell you."

They all felt from Nick's manner that he had something of serious import to make known, and they followed him to the beach, just where their own boat was.

"Fellows, you know when I originated our band, which some call the River Rats, and others the Red Ferrets, that we all swore to chip in our earnings to a common purse, help one another, obey all rules and stand by each member of the band no matter what happened."

A murmur in the affirmative ran through the group as Nick Norcoss paused for an instant, and then came the words:

"Now I went with Pete Pepper after the boat we just took up to the loft, and I wish to tell you first what happened."

"We found there a man almost a giant in size, stealing the boat, and we watched him until he got it into the water, and he's about the only man I ever saw who could have done it without help."

"Then he tied the boat to a tree on the lawn and went toward the stable."

"He wasn't gone long, but we heard a cry for help, a blow, and the man came back with the oars, and Pete and I faced him."

"Yes, and I tell you I was scared, for we didn't hev our clothes on," said Pete.

"The man then sprung upon me with a knife, and I brought the half oar I had down upon his head."

A silence followed that was impressive and oppressive as well.

"Then we keeps the secret, does we not, pals?" a voice asked.

"We do," came in earnest, yet suppressed tones.

"Fellows, I thank you!"

"Now let us get away, but remember our next meeting," and the meeting of the Red Ferrets was over for the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DOUBLE MYSTERY.

THE meeting of the young "River Rats" was held as before, under circumstances when they had to be on the alert to guard against arrest by the police.

Though not actually caught in any crime the police dreaded the band, and suspected them of many of the evil deeds done along the river-banks and about the city.

They had several of the band "spotted," and only needed the slightest excuse to run them in as offenders.

Under such circumstances Nick urged upon his followers to be most careful and to do nothing that would bring them in contact with the officers of the law.

At this meeting the affair of the night before was not referred to in any way, only the matter discussed of any clue being found as to who and what the unknown girl was who had been discovered dead in the boat that had drifted upon the grounds of Millionaire Marlborough.

Nick looked pale and worried, but was calm and full of nerve, and when the meeting broke up sought his rooms, where he threw himself upon his cot to rest, for he had slept none during the night.

His immediate chum, Pete Pepper, had gone out for a purpose.

That purpose was to hang about the offices of the afternoon papers, which he knew would contain an account of the affair of the night before in which he had been an actor.

It was shortly after noon when the newsboys began to circulate through the city, calling out:

"Extra! Extra! Double murder committed up-town!"

Pete was not long in securing a copy of each one of the afternoon papers, for he wished to read every account, and hastening to his quarters he roused Nick from a deep sleep by entering the room.

"You've got the papers?" asked Nick, wide awake on the instant.

"Yes; here they are, and you read 'em, for yer knows its work for me ter do it."

Nick took the papers and the two went to the lower room to read them.

After glancing at each one Nick selected the one he deemed the best account and in a low voice read as follows:

"A DOUBLE MURDER!

"AN ILL-OMENED MANSION!

"MILLIONAIRE MARLBOROUGH MAKES

"ANOTHER GHASTLY DISCOVERY!

"A MYSTERY OF THE NIGHT!

"After dawn this morning the butler in Marlborough mansion, not seeing the doors of the stable open, went out to awaken the coachman, supposing that he had overslept himself.

"He found the door unlocked, and lying upon the stable floor covered with blood, was Herman Hendrickson the coachman, a knife-wound in his heart.

"In horror the butler ran to the mansion to alarm Mr. Marlborough who was still sleeping, and the startling tidings of the murder flew like wildfire among the servants engaged upon Mr. Marlborough's premises.

"The millionaire was soon dressed and upon the scene of the tragedy, and a search revealed the fact that the coachman had retired, but aroused by a sound in the stable, he had gone thither to see what it meant, and met his death at the hands of an assassin.

"A further search revealed a false key in the stable door, and then the discovery was made by a servant that the boat upon the lawn, the same one in which the fair suicide, Estelle Enders, had been found, was gone.

"A further search revealed the fact that a dead body lay upon the shore just at the water's edge.

"It was the body of a man of large size, roughly dressed and with a face that was evil in the extreme.

"The police recognized the man as a noted ex-convict and crook known as 'Giant Jack,' and greatly feared by the officers of the law as a most desperate character.

"He had been sentenced to prison for murder, but his companions having a political pull, got him pardoned out, and it was supposed that he again entered upon a life of crime, though nothing on which he could be arrested could be traced to him.

"There was found upon his body a long-bladed knife, stained with blood, and his hands and clothing also bore stains, showing that he had killed the coachman.

"But, the strangest part of it is how a man, with his skull crushed in as was that of Giant Jack, could have gone from the stable to where his body was found, as such a blow would naturally be considered instantly fatal.

"The boat being gone, and the oars taken from the stable, the theory of the police is that Giant Jack had confederates in crime, and they carried him to the beach, but be-

coming alarmed from some cause, left the body and fled.

"A widespread search has begun for the stolen boat, and it is hoped that it may be successful, but the fact that this particular boat was stolen, and murder committed to get it, revives the belief of many that it formed in some way a clue that might go to prove that Estelle Enders was not a suicide, but lost her life by violence."

CHAPTER IX.

A CALL FOR HELP.

THE Chief of the Secret Service Bureau in Chicago was seated in his private office looking over his morning mail, which was a large one.

An open scrap-book, with newspaper clippings, lay upon a table by his side, and over this he would glance from time to time as he read his letters.

A pile of "clippings" from the morning papers also lay upon the table, awaiting to be pasted in the scrap-book.

The Secret Service chief was a handsome man, though his face wore a troubled look now, and his musing ha'f aloud showed that he was in a quandary, for he said:

"Well, I confess I am at fault, and my very best men can give me no clue to work upon, and so I was forced to send for the young Ferret of the Golden Fetter, as he is called, and who calls himself Dick Doom."

"I confess myself beaten, and so have made a call for help."

"If Dick Doom cannot aid me then I know no one who can."

"Why, the fellow is an unsolved mystery himself, from what I have seen and known of him, and if there is any one who can tell me of him I do not know who it is."

"Well, his telegram said he would be in my office this morning, so I will refuse myself to all visitors and have a long talk with him."

Touching a bell an attendant in an adjoining room answered it and said:

"I am expecting a visitor, Chains; his name is Richard Richardson, so admit him and no one else."

"Yes, chief, but there is some one here to see you now."

"Who is he?"

"An old guy, sir."

"Just what do you mean by that, Chains?"

"A man from Wayback, sir, an old Hayseed."

"I do not care to see him."

"He says he can tell you something you don't know, and he seems very earnest about it, sir."

"Well, I am willing to learn, so will see old Hayseed, as Mr. Richardson has not put in an appearance yet."

"Show the caller in, Chains."

The attendant departed and soon after ushered into the chief's private office a man who did indeed have the look and smell of the country about him.

He wore an old slouch hat, a long light overcoat of ancient cut, striped pants and carried in his hand an old-time carpet-sack, and an umbrella of enormous size.

His face was ruddy and clean-shaven, save for a fringe of grayish whiskers running from ear to ear, while his yellow locks were long and soapy.

"Be you the gov'n'er?" he asked as he approached the chief who eyed him with an air of assumed interest.

"I am the Chief of the Chicago Secret Service, sir, but not the governor."

"All the same, stranger; but I'm right deown glad ter see yer, so I be," and he shook hands heartily with the chief, deposited his carpetsack and umbrella upon the desk, right on top of the papers, and, drawing up a chair, took a seat, while he extended a plug of tobacco with the query:

"Have a chaw, gov'n'er, for its real old nigger heel terbacca."

"No, thank you, sir; but, may I ask what your errand with me is?"

"Certain you kin, and I'll answer on ther dead level."

"Well, what is it?"

"To help yer out of a fix."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean, stranger, that yer is ag'in' ther wall and I knows a thing or two," and the man winked knowingly.

"Well, I do not exactly catch your meaning, my friend?"

"Yer'll know when I axes yer if yer has found the man as murdered that pretty Enders gal, yit?"

In spite of his nerve the chief started, but said calmly:

"That was a suicide, not a murder."

"Nothing of ther kind; it were a clean case o' murder."

"What do you know about it?"

"Nothin'! but I has come ter find out."

"For what reason?"

"Yer gave a call on me fer help and here I is, chief, at yer service from Wayback!"

"Dick Doom as I live!" cried the chief, grasping the hand of his strange visitor.

CHAPTER X.

THE CASE IN HAND.

"WELL, Dick Doom, I am more than delighted to see you, and I frankly admit you took me in completely, for I imagined I could smell the scent of new mown hay about you," said the chief, after warmly shaking hands with the pretended old farmer.

"Then my disguise is a good one, you think?"

"The very best; but then you are an expert in masquerading, as I have had reason to know."

"I had just told my man, Chains, that I would see no one as I was expecting a visitor by the name of Richard Richardson, but as he said there was an old guy from Wayback outside I concluded to see you."

"I am glad you did, sir; but I wired you I would be here this morning."

"Yes, I received your dispatch, and I was glad you could come, for this case baffles us all."

"It is a case of a triple murder, I believe, sir."

"I do not know just how to catalogue it, but you shall know the facts."

"A millionaire resident of our city, who has handsome grounds about his house, which is on the lake-shore in a fashionable suburb of Chicago, found on his shore one morning a pleasure row-boat with the dead body of a girl in it."

"Beautiful of course."

"She really was, and was refined, richly dressed, wore costly jewelry—I have all locked up here—and a purse containing considerable money."

"Then robbery was not the cause of her murder?"

"It was a case of suicide, Dick, for she had a slip of paper in her hand, saying as much, and a bottle of chloroform was in the boat, and her handkerchief had been soaked with the drug."

Dick Doom rapidly made notes of what the chief said and then asked:

"When was this?"

The date was given, and after answering other questions about the young girl, the chief went on to say:

"Now I had a set-back to the suicide theory when word came that the boat, in which the body had been found, and which was drawn up on the lawn at Mr. Marlborough's home, had been stolen one night and two murders committed."

"The coachman of the place was found dead in his stable, in his night clothes, just as he got out of bed in evident alarm, and there was a knife wound in his heart."

"Out upon the grounds by the water lay the dead body of a notorious crook known

as Giant Jack, his skull crushed in, evidently by a blow from a heavy cane."

"The boat was gone from the lawn, and it was in getting the oars from the stable that Giant George had aroused the coachman, driven his knife to his heart and, after receiving a fatal blow, it is remarkable to relate, he ran to the water's edge and fell."

"He had a confederate, of course."

"Certainly, for the boat and oars were gone."

"Where are they?"

"It has been utterly impossible to find any clue to the boat."

"Your men have worked well, chief?"

"Most thoroughly."

"And you think that the boat was stolen for some other reason than its value?"

"That is how it looks to me."

"Can you get no clue?"

"Well, the servants at the Marlborough Mansion report that the day before the murder of the coachman a youth, one of the young toughs of the town, came up and had a talk with him."

"He was there for quite a while, and the coachman showed him the boat and about the premises."

"Have your men looked for this young tough?"

"Yes, but in vain."

"He must be found, chief!"

"Of course, for he was doubtless the confederate of the ex-convict and crook, Giant George."

"Did the people of the place see enough of him to recognize him if they saw him again?"

"Yes, one of the servant girls said she would know him anywhere, and the millionaire's valet had a talk with him and would recognize him he is sure."

"I suppose I can see the premises by going there?"

"Oh, yes; I will give you an order to do so, for Mr. and Mrs. Marlborough have closed up the mansion, leaving it in care of the servants, and have gone East for a stay of some months."

"Well, chief, I will have a look at the place, and then set my traps."

"So you will take my case, for your telegram did not say so?"

"I will take the case, chief."

"I believe you never take a case except you see that you can win it, Dick Doom?"

"I take a case to win, chief," was the calm and confident response.

"Well, Dick, I place all in your hands, and for any aid you need, call upon me, for I am confident now of the result."

"Where can you be found?"

"I am at the Leland Hotel, sir, and registered Richard Richardson, under my present disguise."

"May I ask to look over the papers in this matter?"

"I have this scrap-book and all ready for you, so will send them round to your hotel."

"I'll take them," was the quiet response and into the carpet-bag they went, and Dick Doom took his departure, looking just what he represented himself to be, an Indiana farmer.

CHAPTER XI.

A PIGEON TO PLUCK.

"CULLY, I has game afoot."

"Is I ter git a shot, Buck?"

"In course you is, for hain't we pards?"

The speakers were two very hard-featured men, roughly dressed and plainly belonging to that class of society in Chicago known as "Leg-Pullers," or in other words, toughs.

They were seated upon the lake-shore smoking their pipes, and kept a watchful look about them as though they did not wish to have any one come near enough to catch what they were saying.

One was bearded and with unkempt hair, while the other wore a mustache only and made more pretensions to dress, but both had the faces of men hardened by crime.

"What's yer game, pal?" asked one of the other, speaking in a low tone, after a hasty glance about him.

"Thar's a hayseed in town what must hev hit a prize in ther lottery, or got a inheritance."

"Why?"

"Well, Cully, he jest rolls around among ther Dime Museums, takes in the theaters, goes to the races and spends his money free, and he's got lots o' boodle."

"Yer has seen it?"

"I has."

"Whar is he?"

"At ther Leland, and we've got ter touch him for his pile."

"I'm thar."

"But, I tell yer he looks like a trim one as could fight, so we must git him cornered, and if he squeals we'll knife him, or break his head bone in."

"All right, but when?"

"To-night, for he comes down along the wharfs every night to look at ther sights, and we can steer him up some lonesome street and do him."

"You bet we kin."

"We'll be satisfied with his boodle and jewelry, for the old bloke is well fixed with a ticker and chain; but if he sets up a howl then his life pans out."

"Sure, we must not let him roar on us."

"You bet we mustn't."

"Is yer sart'in he has plenty o' ther rags?"

"I counted at a glance some hundreds o' money in roll, Cully."

"Then its worth ther killin' and risk."

"It is."

"When shall we give him a deal?"

"To-night, for I'll rig up as a lake capt'in, go to the Lelands, git in with the old bloke and take him a walk to-night."

"Good!"

"I'll steer him down this way, and you shadder us, so as to be on hand, when I gits my arm under his chin, to rob him."

"I'll go now and spruce up a bit, and when I are eatin' a good dinner at Leland's, as Cap'n Job Johnson, of the schooner Buffalo Bill, you bet I'll think o' you tacklin' pork and beans in a hash-house down here."

"Now don't rub it in, pal, 'cause you kin go on yer shape whar I dasn't," growled the other.

Soon after they parted, and the one who was to play the lake captain of the Buffalo Bill, went to his quarters, glancing searchingly about before he entered the rookery, like one who was a hunted man.

Half an hour after he came out, wearing a blue pea-jacket and sailor pants, and a seacap.

He went at a rapid pace to the more respectable part of the city, where the Leland Hotel was situated, and entering the office, registered as:

"CAPTAIN JOB JOHNSON,

"LAKE SCHOONER BUFFALO BILL."

Having paid for his supper he walked about the rotunda, until at last his eyes fell upon one whom he had evidently been searching for.

It was the detective, Dick Doom, still in his disguise of Richard Richardson, of Indiana.

Going up to the detective the pretended captain of the schooner Buffalo Bill, at once became sociable, and the supposed farmer humoring his evident desire to get acquainted, the two soon entered into conversation that appeared to please both of them.

After an hour's talk together they adjourned to the bar, where they had a drink together, and then started for the dining-room.

The pretended farmer explained that he was not up to eating a six-o'clock dinner, so waited for seven o'clock supper, he always preferring to dine at noon, and this chimed in with the "captain's" views, exactly, he said.

After supper the "captain" proposed to look in at the theaters and see the sights, and his companion, whom he called "judge," at once acquiesced, and they started on a round of pleasure.

Two such characters together would have been noticeable in any other place than Chicago, but in that city of many freaks, no one appeared to notice them.

And yet there was one who was noticing them, and who had shadowed them from the moment they left the hotel together.

That one was the pal of the "captain," and he never lost sight of them for an instant.

After leaving the theater the skipper of the Buffalo Bill proposed a walk through the town, and he led the way into one of the most dangerous streets of the city for a stranger to enter.

But the intended victim showed no reluctance to go, and did not appear to see the shadower upon their tracks.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RESCUE.

If the detective suspected his new-found companion he did not show the slightest sign of doing so.

He went along like one who was in town to see all there was going on, and didn't care for the expense.

The hour was growing late and there were few persons abroad, for the night was not a pleasant one, a chilly breeze coming off of the lake and bringing with it an unpleasant mist.

The two were loitering along, talking earnestly together, when a quick step was heard behind them, and a rough-looking man passed.

It was the pal of the pretended lake captain.

The latter saw that the shadower had given him a hint to act, for no one was in sight, and he at once decided to go on.

Falling back a pace behind the detective he suddenly dealt him a severe blow upon the temple and at the same time threw his right arm around his neck, clamping it with irresistible force.

At the same instant his pal came running back to his aid.

For once, Dick Doom, the famous detective, had been caught off his guard, and he was certainly in dangerous hands.

The blow on his temple had dazed him, for a moment depriving him of strength or the power to act, and he was wholly at the mercy of his foes, when suddenly, out of the shadow of a door leading into the shop of a machinist, sprung a slender form, there was a heavy blow that rang out ominously, and the man that held Dick Doom in the garrote, fell to the pavement like one suddenly struck lifeless.

The other, who had begun to rifle the pockets of the detective, also got a blow across the hand that caused him to drop a long-bladed knife he carried, and in an instant the lithe form that had so suddenly appeared, leaped into the air, and a vigorous kick sent the fellow to the ground, while the rescuer was on him quick as a flash.

This had been but a moment's work, but in that time Dick Doom had regained his dazed senses, and the man who had just fallen was quickly handcuffed, and the second one brought to terms in a second by finding a revolver-muzzle thrust in his face as he was struggling with the rescuer of the detective.

"I caves, cully, so don't shoot," growled the man, letting his arms drop to his side.

"Hold your hands together!" was the stern response.

The order was obeyed, and he, too, was quickly handcuffed, and then the two were tied together.

"Better get out of this neighborhood, Country, for there'll be plenty to rescue them."

The speaker was the rescuer, and the detective turned toward him and said:

"Good advice, which I will follow."

"Will you come with me?"

"I don't mind, for awhile."

"I guess you are not just what you seem?"

"Not altogether, my brave lad, but I was fairly caught in a trap by these fellows, though I was looking for it, and I owe you my life."

"Not so bad as that, sir."

"Yes; they meant to kill me, for I would have resisted, and there lies that fellow's weapon."

"Come; we will move on with your prisoners."

The two toughs were made to rise, and fastened together by having a third pair of small steel handcuffs slipped on them as they stood side by side, they were told to march.

"If we meet any one and you give an alarm, it will be the worse for you," warned the detective sternly, who, with his rescuer, walked behind the prisoners.

"Who is you, anyway?"

"Never mind who I am."

"I does believe I has been tuk in by a officer."

"Perhaps you have."

"Say, pal, this be awful, hain't it?"

"I is afeerd it means board in Joliet for some years, cully."

"That's what it does; but, see that!"

Several men were seen to come out of a low drinking-place together, and before a warning could be given the prisoners, by the detective, they both gave a peculiar cry, very like a signal.

In an instant it was answered and the men came at a run toward the detective and his prisoners,

CHAPTER XIII.

A CLOSE CALL.

The moment Dick Doom heard the signal and saw the response, he felt that there was trouble ahead, and at once shoved his two prisoners into the entrance way of a closed shop, while he sprung in front of them with the remark:

"Come, my gallant rescuer, we'll stand them off."

But, to his surprise his rescuer suddenly dashed away, as though to flee from this new danger, and disappeared in the darkness.

"Coward! Call the police at least to my aid!" cried Dick Doom, utterly amazed at the act of one whom he had a few moments before regarded as a hero and owed his life to.

But, thrown upon his own resources he acted promptly and said:

"See here, men, those fellows intend to attempt your rescue, but if you aid them in any way I shall kill you, so move at the peril of your life."

The gang had now come up on a run, and they were drunk the detective saw at a glance.

There were five of them, and they halted ten feet off, while one of them called out:

"Who sounded the help call of the crooks?"

"We did, pals, and we need aid, for this is a detective in the rig of a hayseed, and he's got the nippers onto us."

"Come, that won't do, shadow man, so let 'em go."

"Back! I will stand no nonsense!" came in the stern tones of the detective.

"Yer don't skeer us wuth a cent, shadow man, for we is in our own grazing ground, and all folks here will lend a helping hand and don't you forget it, see?"

"You will simply meet your death if you dare make any attempt at rescuing these cut-throats," was the response of Dick Doom.

"Who'll kill us?"

"I will!"

"It hain't in yer."

"Try me."

The men held a short conversation together and then decided upon their course.

This was to make a rush all together upon the daring detective at bay, and thus rescue their companions, whom they had recognized, at the same time killing their keeper and then all scattering to escape the police who would doubtless come to the scene in force.

Having decided what they would do, they wished to make the attack a surprise, so one asked:

"See here, Hayseed, does yer give up our pals?"

"No."

Hardly had the words left the lips of Dick Doom when the gang, now increased to seven in number, made a sudden rush to rescue the prisoners.

There was a flash and sharp report from a revolver in Dick Doom's hand, and the leader and spokesman went down in his tracks.

But, the others having been checked only an instant by the fall of their leader, pushed on and it looked very black for Dick Doom, as his prisoners now were joining in the struggle.

But, just as all looked desperate for the detective there arose a cheer from a dozen throats, and upon the scene coming out of the darkness like phantoms, rushed a band led by the one who had a short while before rescued Dick Doom!

The assailants of the detective at once broke away in flight, though all of them were not so fortunate as to escape, for several were captured by those who had so timely come to the rescue of Dick Doom the detective.

But, hardly had the assailants fled when there was heard the call of the police some distance away. Instantly leaving their prisoners, all but one of the rescuers made a dash to escape from the scene!

That one who remained was the one who had just rescued Dick Doom, and he held his revolver covering the three men he and his party had captured, although they looked as though they intended to make a break for liberty before the officers coming at a double-quick, should arrive.

A word from Dick Doom checked them, for he said sternly:

"Take warning from the dead man at my feet and do not throw your lives away."

CHAPTER XIV.

MASTER OF THE SITUATION.

The warning given by Dick Doom had the effect of causing the prisoners to show no other effort to escape, and they seemed to feel that the man who uttered the threat was more than he outwardly appeared to be.

At the feet of the detective lay the body of the man he had shot, and behind him were his two prisoners with their hands in irons.

In front were the other three prisoners taken and the rescuer was guarding them, all forming a striking picture in the darkness, illuminated only by a gas lamp some distance away.

The detective having gotten the master hand of the prisoners turned to his rescue and said:

"I must beg your pardon, my young friend, for thinking you had deserted me, when you went for aid which you quickly

got, and I again owe my life to you as these men had me at their mercy.

"We will talk together later, for here are the police."

Just then up came a sergeant and four police officers. They had their clubs in their hands and were ready for business.

"Ho, sergeant! here are some prisoners for you," Dick Doom called out.

"It's a lie, sergeant, for he and his gang set on us to rob us, and they kilt one of our pards, and now he is making a grand bluff to run us in," said one of the men who were under the muzzle of the revolver in the young rescuer's hand.

"I'll run ther hull of yer in, I will," said the sergeant, with a strong Irish brogue, and he added, as he grabbed roughly hold of the rescuer's arm, instead of the prisoners:

"Put up that weepin, yer young devil of sin, or I'll brain yez."

"Silence, sir, and let that young man alone!"

"Here! look and see who is in authority now!" and Dick Doom stepped up to the sergeant and threw open his coat, so that the gas-light fell upon his breast where his badges of office were, and met the eyes of the policemen alone.

"I begs yer pardon, sur, but I c'u'dn't tell who was ter blame, could I? Now, sur, yer orders and they'll be obeyed."

"Then take those two men in irons, with these other three, to the prison, and send the patrol wagon for the body of this man whom I was forced to kill."

"Say to the chief that I will see him in the morning. He will know who I am when he sees the handcuffs on this prisoner," and Dick Doom spoke in a whisper to the sergeant, who said:

"I guess I knows, sur, who you is afther being this minit, and I'll do as yer tells me, sur."

"See that you do."

"Now my friend, come with me," and he turned to his rescuer.

"One minit capt'in, av yez pl'aze," said the sergeant.

"Well?"

"Can I have a wurrud with yez, sur?"

"Certainly, sergeant."

"It's this, sur," whispered the sergeant: "I knows thet young spaldeen, sur, so kape yer eyes onto him, sur."

"Who is he?"

"Well, sur, we have niver been afther catchin' him exactly, but he is ther leader of a gang of young toughs that are the devil's own hatchin', so they are."

"Well, he did me good service and I wish to know more of him; but I thank you for your warning, sergeant, and say to the chief that Detective Richardson will call at ten in the morning, and sends the five prisoners and the dead body in."

"I'll tell him that same, sur, and good luck to yez."

Dick Doom hastened on after his rescuer who had seemed anxious to get away as he was moving off in the darkness.

But he halted when he saw the detective hastening after him and they met just under a lamp-post, where each could see the other distinctly.

"Well, my young friend, I wish to again thank you for your services in my behalf, and to ask pardon for the thought that you had deserted me," and Dick Doom looked fixedly into the face of his rescuer.

He saw a youth of perhaps eighteen, with a fearless, handsome face, fine form fairly well clothed, and a look of one who had been well reared in spite of the bad character given him by the police sergeant.

"I only did what I thought was right, sir," modestly said the rescuer.

"May I ask your name, for I am determined that we shall be friends."

"My name is Nick Norcross, sir," was the answer.

CHAPTER XV.

PARDS.

HAVING learned the name of his brave young rescuer, after hearing what the police sergeant had said of him and his gang, Dick Doom said:

"I would like to have a talk with you, my young friend, so will you come with me to my hotel?"

Nick was in a quandary. He had discovered that the old "Hayseed" was not just what his outward appearance indicated.

He was one with authority, as had been evidenced by his control over the police squad that had arrived, and he must be one in high place to be allowed to depart, after his own confession that he had killed the man whom the officers found dead there.

He had also stood sponsor for him, and now wished him to accompany him to his hotel.

"He is some big Secret Service man in disguise," flashed through Nick's mind.

There were reasons for his not wishing the stranger, whoever he might be, to know more of him, and he wished to get out of going to the hotel if he could do so.

So he said.

"I guess I'll have to look up my fellows, sir, who fled when the police came."

"Then you have a band of lads with you?"

"Well, sir, yes."

"And why should they run from the police?"

"It's just this, sir, that the police are after us all the time, and we do not wish to be run in unless they can prove that we have been guilty of some crime."

"I wish you to go to my hotel with me," said Dick Doom, decidedly, after Nick's last remark, and the youth answered:

"All right, sir; I'll go."

They walked off together, Nick urging that they should hasten out of that locality, as it was the worst in Chicago.

Entering the hotel Dick Doom led the way up to his room, and entering it, the youth saw that the pretended countryman had a parlor and bedroom, handsomely furnished.

He took the easy-chair to which Dick Doom motioned him, and the latter sat where he could gaze straight into his face, illuminated by the gaslight which fell upon him.

"I brought you here to have a talk with you, and the first thing I shall tell you is that I am a detective."

There was an emphasis upon the last words uttered, and Dick Doom seemed to have a purpose in the way he said them, while his eyes were riveted upon the face of the youth.

But there was no start, no change of expression, and the answer came, calmly:

"Yes, sir, I knew you were a Secret Service officer the moment the police sergeant obeyed you as he did."

"What did you think I was before then?"

"An unfortunate countryman who had fallen into bad hands."

"The sergeant gave you a bad character."

"Yes, sir, the police do not like us."

"Who do you include with you?"

"My fellows."

"You have a band, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"May I ask for what purpose?"

Nick was silent, and the detective said:

"See here, my young friend, I owe you my life, and twice you came to my rescue. I was caught in a trap, and I would have been killed but for you."

"This debt of gratitude alone, which I can never repay wholly, would keep me from doing you a harm, betraying your confidence placed in me."

"I read human nature pretty well, and I'll tell you frankly I do not believe you to be wicked at heart, whatever you may have

done under circumstances beyond your control."

"Thank you, sir, for that opinion."

"I do wish to serve you, and if you are going wrong, to keep you out of mischief and trouble."

"I wish to set you up in some business that will pay you, in return for what you have done for me, and I desire that you speak frankly to me."

"I will, sir, and I'll say now that I would not take a dollar of your money in payment for what I did."

"But you are poor."

"I am not rich, sir, but do not want for anything, for I have a little money saved up."

"Then we pool our earnings, and it belongs to all of us."

"You mean you and your fellows?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do they earn money?"

"Selling papers, sir, as messengers, boot-blacks, and in other ways."

"Well, Nick, I will not press you as to your past, and what you are engaged in; but I wish to say that I need the aid of just such a one as you are in some work I have on hand, and I'll pay you well for your services, and it will lead to something better for me."

"Thank you, sir."

"You will engage with me in this?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, come here to-morrow afternoon at three, and dress yourself as a country boy, and I'll be ready for you."

"Yes, sir."

"And we will be friends."

"Yes, sir, I like you, and we will be pards." was Nick's response, as he grasped the detective's hand in leaving.

He had not been gone an instant, when, seizing a heavy cloak and high hat, and putting on a false beard, Dick Doom was on his track, thoroughly changed in appearance!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RIVER RAT'S RECORD.

DICK DOOM shadowed Nick Norcross from the hotel door, crossing the street and keeping him in view,

He saw that he took a direction that would not lead him to the scene where he had so nearly lost his life, and he was determined to discover just where he went.

The youth did not appear to know that he was being shadowed, and went leisurely along like one perfectly acquainted with the city, and as though with a direct purpose in view.

He went directly to his own quarters, in the obscure locality, which was a very secluded and quiet one, and Dick Doom saw him disappear in the hall-door, which he noticed that he opened with a key.

The detective waited for a few minutes and then went to the door and made a record of the number.

He took in the situation of the house and the locality in general and at the corner saw the name of the street, or rather alley, and then walked rapidly back to the hotel.

The next morning at the appointed time he was at the office of the chief of the Secret Service.

The latter had arrived at his office at nine. He had been told of the capture of five crooks and the killing of one, and so was anxiously awaiting the coming of Dick Doom.

The detective, for his own reasons, still kept to his disguise of an Indiana farmer, and when he sent in his name as Richard Richardson he was quickly admitted.

"Well, Dick, you have been at work, I see, for you have both killed your game and bagged it."

"I am sorry I was forced to kill a man, chief, but I believe you know me well enough to feel that I take life only when

driven to do so, and I never make a grave if it can be avoided," and Dick Doom spoke very seriously.

"I well know that, Dick, and I am not blaming you; but what were you about last night?"

"I'll tell you in a few words chief."

"Do, so."

"A pretended lake captain stopped for dinner at the Leland, and sought my acquaintance."

"He proposed to show me the city by gas-light, and confident that he had a motive other than kindness, I went with him."

"He led me into one of the worst streets in your windy city, and though on my guard, I was entrapped and would have been killed but for the courage of a youth who rescued me."

"Yes, reported as the leader of the River Rats," remarked the chief, turning to the paper on his desk.

"A youth who is not as bad, I believe, as the police paint him, chief."

"It is in his favor that he helped you."

"He saved my life, and when I was attacked by a gang who sought to rescue my prisoners he took to his heels, but only for a purpose."

"To get out of harm's way, eh?"

"Oh, no, for he returned as though by magic and brought with him a band of youths who put my assailants to flight, after I had killed one, and captured three of them for me."

"They are improving, are the River Rats."

"They skipped when they saw the police, all but their leader, and he went with me to my hotel, and refused my offer of pay for what he had done, while he is willing to help me if I need him."

"He is a young devil, Dick, and as a crook knows it all, if you can use him; but I doubt it."

"What do you know of him, chief?"

The chief turned to a book near and read:

"Nick Norcross, a youth, about 5 feet eight inches in height, weight about 160, black hair and eyes, stands like a soldier, handsome face and lives near river, just where, no one can find out."

"Is leader of the band known to police as River Rats, and composed of youths from twelve to seventeen."

"Guilty of misdemeanors, and suspected of many crimes of a petty nature, perhaps of a serious kind."

"That is the record of the River Rats, Dick."

"It is not an enviable one, chief; but, why do not the police get some clue against them?"

"How can they?"

"I will do so, and if you will only order your men not to watch those River Rats too closely I will find out just who they are and what they do."

"I wish that you would do so, and what you tell of their captain encourages me to believe there is good stuff in him."

"I am sure of it, sir, and I will promise to show you just what he is before long."

"Then you intend to shadow him?"

"I shall know all about Nick Norcross soon, chief."

"Good! But now, to this killing."

"It must be set down to an officer killing in discharge of his duty, chief, and you must sustain me in this."

"Of course I will, and so will take your full report and shield you as to your real identity."

"Now what have you done in this Marlborough case?"

"Next to nothing, sir, though I am working on it," was Dick Doom's answer, and then he accompanied the chief before the proper authorities to report the affair of the night before, and make his charges against the prisoners.

This occupied several hours after which Dick Doom returned to his hotel to keep his engagement with Nick Norcross at three o'clock.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DETECTIVE'S SUSPICION.

DICK DOOM found his young rescuer prompt, for he was on hand sharp at three, and was ushered into the detective rooms.

"I wish you to go with me, Norcross, this afternoon, and thus get an idea of what I desire your aid in."

"Yes, Mr. Richardson; but I hope you had no trouble at Police Headquarters, this morning?"

"No; I made my report of the affair last night and it was accepted, and I spoke favorably of you, of course."

"They do not know me I think by name, sir."

"Yes they do, Norcross, and they give you a very unsavory record."

"I have no doubt of that, sir; but I remember hearing an old saying that the Devil was not so black as he is painted, and it might apply in my case."

"I hope it will, and in fact so believe; but I congratulate you upon your appearance, for you are an out and out greenhorn."

"Thank you, sir," and Nick laughed as he caught sight of himself in the full length mirror and saw how thoroughly he was impersonating the green country boy.

He had bought a suit of clothes, a new hat, and wore a wig, and did indeed look like a greenhorn, for his expression greatly aided his appearance as such.

The two then left the hotel together and when at last the home of the Marlboroughs came in sight and Nick saw that it was the destination of the detective he came to a sudden halt and asked:

"Do you intend going there, sir?"

"Where?"

"To millionaire Marlborough's home?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the place?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, come along."

"Do you wish me to go there with you?"

"Yes, of course."

Nick sighed, glanced about him and then walked on in silence.

His manner and words had been quickly noticed by the detective, but nothing was said then, and the two soon entered the grounds.

The servants only were there and they quickly gathered about the two visitors.

When Dick Doom had before visited the millionaire's home it had been in a different disguise from the one he then wore, so he was not recognized by the servants as one they had seen before.

Calling the butler one side he played the countryman upon him and said, as he slipped a bank-note into his hand:

"Me and my boy has been readin' up about ther going on here, and wanted ter look around enough ter pay fer it, so we can say we has seen ther place when we goes back to Injiani."

Urged by a two-dollar bill the butler was willing to tell all he knew, and to show the supposed countrymen around the premises, into the stable and everywhere that Dick Doom expressed a desire to go, for another two dollars were forthcoming to "buy something for the gals," as the detective expressed it, and this got the cook and servant girls to talking also, as well as one of the men-servants who was with them and poked fun at the visitors to show how smart he was.

When the detective and his companions had left the place Dick Doom said:

"We will return at once to the hotel."

Back to the hotel he went with Nick, and when they were in the detective's rooms the latter said:

"You have read about the tragedies at the Marlborough Mansion of course, Nick?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, as you know that I am a detective, I wish to tell you that I need your

services, and shall engage you at a good salary in my work."

"Thank you, sir."

"What I wish you to do is to keep your eyes upon the Marlborough Mansion, reporting to me all who go there and what the servants do."

"Yes, sir."

"You must give me an address where I can find you, if I need you at any time, and report to me every evening."

"I will, sir, and my address I will write down for you," and Nick wrote the address on a card and handed it to the detective, who made no comment whatever while the youth said:

"I hope you are going to find out the truth, sir, about the death of that poor young lady who was murdered in the boat?"

"I thought that she committed suicide, Nick?"

"Yes, sir, it was so stated."

"Have you any reason for believing that she did not take her own life?"

The keen eyes of the detective were upon the face of the youth with a gaze that seemed to read him through and through, and Nick colored and seemed confused; but after a moment he said:

"No, sir; the papers ought to know, and I only thought that one so beautiful and good would not wish to take her own life."

"Well, Nick, the real cause of suicide with many, no one can guess, or ever know, and a beautiful and rich woman may lose her charm in life as well as an ugly one, and one who is poor."

"I am anxious to learn all I can about the case, for somehow, with you, I do not believe that Miss Enders took her own life; but now I'll say good-night, and to-morrow, at six, come here again, and dress as you always do, for I do not care to have you disguised then," and as Nick departed, the detective muttered to himself:

"He knew that girl, and knows something about her death, I am sure!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

DETECTIVE DOHERTY.

THE next morning found Dick Doom, still disguised as a countryman, early at the quarters of the Secret Service chief.

"Well, Dick, what news have you this morning?" asked the chief as he entered.

"Next to nothing, sir."

"I suppose you have seen the fuss the papers are making over the late murders at the Marlborough Mansion, and that we will not make known the facts that a detective officer had to kill a man two nights ago?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I read the papers every day most religiously; but I want one of your best men to aid me."

"You shall have one."

"I wish a man who is quick to act, has nerve and is brainy."

"I have your man."

"Young or old?"

"He is a young man, and he is one who has rendered most valuable services to me."

"Where is he, chief?"

"I will send for him."

In a few minutes a young man of medium size entered, with an intelligent, handsome face and a quick, nervous manner about him.

"Mr. Richardson, this is the detective officer I spoke of, Mr. John H. Doherty, and a man you can rely upon."

At the chief's flattering introduction of him John Doherty blushed like a school-girl, while Dick Doom shook his hand and said:

"Mr. Doherty, here is an address I wish you to go to, secretly remember, and find out if the party is there."

"If away, go to the neighborhood of the Marlborough Mansion and see if you can

find any one answering to this description lounging about the place."

"Yes, sir," and Doherty took the card of description handed to him.

"While at the Marlborough Mansion say to the butler, the servant girl Lucy and the man-servant Paul, that they are to come to the Leland Hotel at six o'clock sharp this evening and ask to see Mr. Richard Richardson."

"Yes, sir."

"You see that they come, for you are also to be there."

"I'll not fail you, sir," and the detective, seeing that there were no more orders for him to receive, took his departure.

"Chief?"

"Yes, Dick."

"The address - gave him was where young Nick Norcross, the leader of the River Rats lives, and whose house your men could not find."

"No? How did you get it?"

"I shadowed him there, sir, and I gave him some work to do to-day, and I wish to know if he does it, so placed Detective Doherty to shade him."

"I see, and I'll wager high that you will find the young scamp a most unmitigated rascal."

"If I do I shall be disappointed both in the boy and my judgment of human nature."

"He is a young terror, Dick."

"Then the sooner he is exposed in his villainy, sir, the better."

"Certainly, and I'll guarantee that you will find him false."

"Doherty will soon know, sir."

"Yes, for Doherty does his work to perfection; but I hope you did not trust that boy with any information that he might profit by."

"Trust me for not going wrong in that particular, chief."

"You are most cautious, I know; but from what you have thus far discovered, Dick, do you still believe that the girl was murdered, or did she commit suicide?"

"She was murdered, chief."

"You have further proof than than I know, upon which to base your belief?"

"I can simply say, sir, that the boat in which the body was found, having been stolen, and the thief having lost his life, and taken life in securing it, shows me that it was taken for a motive other than theft."

"And the motive?"

"To cover up some tracks that the boat might reveal that were left by the murderer."

"Well, Dick, the affair is in your hands and I believe you will work it out in the end to show convincing proof as to whether it was a murder or suicide."

"I have come to Chicago, sir, for that purpose and will not rest until the case is solved to your satisfaction, chief, for I am becoming more and more interested in it, I assure you, if only for the fact that no one seems to know who this Beautiful Unknown was."

"I confess I can give no light upon the matter, and my best ferrets have been unable to discover anything whatever about her."

"Well, chief, wait until I make my report," answered Dick Doom with a smile and he left the detective Headquarters to return to his hotel.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE COOK'S STORY.

THE great detective sat in his rooms alone, as the hour of six approached, and he was waiting for the coming of Doherty and those whom he had told him to bring to the hotel to see him.

He also expected Nick Norcross, and was anxious to have him come while the others were there.

Presently a knock came at the door and Detective John Doherty entered.

"They are here, sir," he said as he entered.

"All right; they can wait a few minutes while I talk with you."

"What have you done?"

"I went to the address, sir, and it is the house of an Italian and his wife, who can speak very little English."

"Fortunately I speak a little Italian and discovered that they rented a room to two boys who always paid promptly, but were out much of the time."

"The woman said that the boys had left early, and so I went up to the neighborhood of the Marlborough Mansion and I saw two youths fishing upon the spiling at a point where they could see the house and grounds.

"As you see, sir, I dressed myself as a clergyman, and going up to the boys had a long talk with them, one being the one whose address you gave me with his description."

"And the other?"

"Was a different looking lad, sir, not refined looking as was the other."

"Did you find out anything from them?"

"Nothing, sir, for they were as close as clams."

"I spoke to them as a clergyman would, and one guyed me, but was reproved by his companion."

"Which one guyed you?"

"The rough-looking chap, sir; he called me a sky pilot, and told me to go and join the Salvation Army, for they wasn't in it."

"But his companion told him to keep quiet and he obeyed him at once, I was surprised to see."

"And then?"

"They were there evidently to keep a watch on the Marlborough Mansion, for that I am certain of, after watching them as I did," said Detective Doherty.

"And then?"

"I took up a position unseen to them, and watched them until late, but they still kept their position on the spiling."

"Changing my costume while in my hiding-place, I went, later in the afternoon, to the mansion, dressed roughly and with a false beard on."

"As I came out, the rough-looking chap passed me, and when I started down-town he followed me, leaving his companion still fishing in the lake."

"I watched my chance and eluded my shadower, went home and came here to meet the people from the mansion whom I had told to come here."

"You have done well, Detective Doherty, and I wish you to leave word at the office if a young man I am expecting calls to have him wait in the office until I send down for him."

"Then come up here with those people."

John Doherty bowed and left the room, and the detective arose and paced the floor, while he mused aloud:

"Well, Norcross did as I told him, watched the mansion, but he got some companion to help him, doubtless his room-mate."

"Am I wrong after all in my opinion of that youth?"

"We shall see, for I shall bring him face to face with facts which will condemn him if he is guilty."

A few moments after the departure of John Doherty he returned and was accompanied by three persons.

One was a stout woman, English and over-dressed in a manner that seemed to delight her.

The second was a trim-looking German girl, and the third was a sleek-looking man dressed with the greatest care.

They were the crook, serving-man and chambermaid of the Marlborough Mansion.

Dick Doom, in his disguise as a countryman, received them in his brusque way,

speaking with a twang in his voice, and said:

"Neow sit right deown thar and I'll talk with yer, for I has somethin' to larn from yer, I knows."

"What might be your name, marm?"

The overdressed cook responded with promptness:

"My name his Mrs. McNab. I'm Hinglish, you know, though Hi married a Irishman, but Hi'm a widder two years, come the next St. Patrick's day, when Hi'll be thirty-seven."

The detective smiled at the manner in which Mrs. McNab had given her biography in a few words, and said:

"Well, Mrs. McNab, I wish to ask you to tell me what you know about the coming ashore of the boat with the body of the young lady who committed suicide."

"Hi'll tell you, sir, in a word," was the answer.

And she did, but gave the information that the day before the killing of the coachman, and the finding of the body of Giant Jack on the grounds, there had come to the mansion a youth about seventeen who had remained talking with the coachman for a long time.

"A youth, you say, Mrs. McNab?"

"Yes, sir."

"Describe him please."

"A 'ansome faced young man, you know, fairly well-dressed and with ha pleasing way about him."

"The description of Nick Norcross," muttered Dick Doom.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RECOGNITION.

AFTER questioning Mrs. McNab closely for some time, and learning all that she knew about the strange youth who had visited the coachman, Dick Doom turned to the chambermaid and said:

"Did you also see the young man talking to the coachman?"

"Yes, sir, I vos see him."

"Did you talk with him?"

"He vos ask me if he could see Hicks t'e coachman, and I sends him to t'e stables."

"And then?"

"Hicks comes out with t'e young mans and show him all around apout t'e place, and t'ey looks at t'e poat v'at lay on t'e lawns."

"You would know the young man if you saw him again?"

"Oh, yes, I vos know him pretty quick," was the confident answer.

Dick Doom, after a few more questions to the pretty German girl, turned to the manservant and said:

"What is your position in the Marlborough Mansion?"

"I am utility man, sir, doing housework, fires, and waiting."

"Did you see this young man of whom the cook and housegirl have spoken?"

"I did, sir, for I was in the stable when he came to see the coachman."

"Describe him, please."

The man did so, and his description was a more complete one than those given by the women.

"Do you know how long the young man remained?"

"Over half an hour, sir."

"And the coachman showed him about?"

"Yes, sir, and though I have not said so before, I know the young man gave the coachman some money when they went out by the boat."

"Ah! was he a friend of the coachman?"

"No, sir, they never met before."

"Where was the boat?"

"It was lying there about ten feet from the water, on the lawn, but the coachman, after the young fellow left, got the butler and me to help move it fifty feet nearer to the house."

"Why did he do this?"

"Well, sir, he only said that he thought it would be safer there than close to the water."

"I see."

Then Dick Doom turned to John Doherty and said,

"Mr. Doherty, go down to the office, please, and see if that visitor I expected is there, and bring him up to my bedroom."

Detective Doherty obeyed, and Dick Doom closed the door between the rooms.

At last he heard some one enter the next room, and Detective Doherty came in and reported that Nick Norcross was next door awaiting him.

"May I ask you to step out into the hall a minute, and I will call you as I wish you," and Dick Doom led his three visitors to the door.

A moment after he opened the bedroom door and called Nick Norcross.

The young leader of the River Rats stepped in with light tread and cheery face and saluted Dick Doom politely.

"Sit there, Norcross, and Mr. Doherty, will you bring Mrs. McNab in, please."

John Doherty stepped to the door and called in the cook.

"Mrs. McNab, did you ever see this young man before?"

With one glance at Nick she cried:

"Ho, but Oi did, sir! hit's the young feller Oi seen talking to the coachman, sir, the day before the murder."

Nick started and turned deadly pale, and Dick Doom's eyes seemed to read his soul.

"Mr. Doherty, will you call in the servant girl now?"

Detective Doherty did so, and the moment her eyes fell upon Nick, before Dick Doom could ask a question, she cried:

"That ish t'e young mans, sir."

"What young man?"

"T'e one what came to see t'e coachman."

"Now, Mr. Doherty," and Dick Doom's eyes were fixed upon the youth who was white-faced but perfectly calm.

Detective Doherty again went to the door, and the servant man was called into the room.

"Have you ever seen that young man before?" he was asked by Dick Doom.

He had not noticed Nick until his attention was attracted toward him, but now started as he saw him, and without a moment of hesitation answered:

"Yes, sir, I know him."

"Who is he?"

"I do not know his name, sir, but he's the one who came to see the coachman the day before he was killed."

"All right."

"Now you three may go, but do not speak to any one of having come here to see me, or of seeing this young man here."

"Remember, you will only get into trouble if you talk."

With this warning Dick Doom dismissed the three servants, telling Detective Doherty to escort them out and then return, and he was left alone with Nick Norcross, whose face was the hue of death.

CHAPTER XXI.

ACCUSED.

WHEN Detective Doherty left the room with the three who had recognized Nick Norcross, as the one who had called upon the coachman the day before his death, a silence fell between Dick Doom and the youth that was most painful.

Dick Doom arose and paced the floor, and it was evident that he was deeply moved by the recognition though he had half expected it, after what he had seen and heard.

Suddenly Nick Norcross spoke, and as though reading the thoughts of the great detective he said:

"You suspect me, Mr. Richardson, of being the accomplice of the man who was killed at the Marlborough Mansion while stealing the boat?"

"What else can I believe, Nick?" said the detective in a kindly tone.

"I admit it all points to my guilt, and I will doubtless be accused of the murder of the coachman, or the accomplice of the murderer."

"Yes, that will be the accusation against you, if not more."

"What more could it be, sir?"

"Much more."

"Please explain, Mr. Richardson."

"It will be said that the man who came for that boat had a motive in getting it to hide a greater crime than theft; in fact, that they killed the girl Ethel Enders, and intended to cover up their tracks beyond discovery."

"Oh! Mr. Richardson."

"That will be the accusation, Nick Norcross, and as the man Giant Jack was killed, the charge of murdering the girl will without doubt be put upon you."

Nick groaned in agony of spirit, but made no reply, and Dick Doom continued:

"Now, what have you to say for yourself, Nick?"

"I did not kill the coachman, sir."

"And the girl?"

"No! no! not that, not that. I could not harm her," cried Nick excitedly.

"Nick?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am sorry, but I must send you to prison."

"I can expect no more, Mr. Richardson, and you must do your duty."

"I cannot talk with you now, as I wish, but I'll tell you to cheer up and I'll do all in my power to prove you innocent."

"Thank you, sir."

"Outside of the belief I have that you are innocent, I owe it to you as a duty that I save you, and I will."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

"Now, I wish to tell you not to speak a word to any one."

"I will not, sir."

"Do not talk, for it may give you more trouble, but leave all to me."

"I will, sir, I will."

A knock came at the door, and Detective Doherty entered.

"Mr. Doherty?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will ring and order a carriage, and you take this prisoner to the chief, with word to put him in a separate cell, and allow no one to disturb him."

"Yes, sir."

"Shall I put the bracelets upon him, sir?" asked Detective Doherty.

Nick looked appealingly toward Dick Doom, but there was no mercy in his face, and his voice was unmoved as he replied:

"Yes, why not, when he is your prisoner?"

"And the charge against him, sir?"

"He is accused of being the accomplice of Giant Jack in the murder of the coachman of Mr. Marlborough."

Detective Doherty wrote down the accusation, and just then a bell-boy came to say that the carriage was at the door.

Slipping one of the steel handcuffs upon the wrist of Nick Norcross, Detective Doherty clasped the other about his own, and the two walked away, the young prisoner casting a strange look at Dick Doom as he left the room.

The two attracted no attention as they went down to the carriage, and soon after Nick Norcross found himself within stone walls.

He was placed in a cell to himself, and the charge of murder was put against his name, after which Detective Doherty reported to the chief what he had been told to do by Dick Doom.

He was just leaving the chief's office when Dick Doom arrived, and said:

"The prisoner is caged, sir."

"All right, Doherty; I wish you to go with me to-night, so be at the hotel at eleven."

"Yes, sir," and Detective Doherty went on his way, while Dick Doom entered the private office of the chief.

CHAPTER XXII.

DICK DOOM'S LETTER.

"WELL, Dick, it seems you have bagged the leader of the River Rats, from what Detective Doherty reported to me," said the chief as Dick Doom entered.

"Yes, sir, he is locked up."

"And accused of murdering that coachman?"

"Yes, sir, that is the supposed crime he has been guilty of."

"I told you he was a bad lot, as also the gang he is leader of."

"Well, chief, I am going to find out just how bad they are."

"You have begun well, for already have you traced the coachman's murderer."

"No, chief, I have only caught one against whom there is suspicion; but I'll know before very long just who the murderer is."

"I hope so; but I believe you will find that young imp the guilty one."

"I do not."

"You do not believe him guilty?"

"No, sir."

"Doherty does, as I do also from what he told me."

"Circumstantial evidence, chief, points to the youth's guilt, but I do not believe him to be, and I have reasons for not doing so."

"Ah! you know more than Doherty told me?"

"No, sir, I only take my reading of his face and I would swear to his being innocent."

"Sentiment, Dick, to cater to one of your fads that you are a mind-reader."

"Call it what you may, my dear chief."

"But you will work to prove him guilty, as in duty bound of course?"

"No, I shall work to prove him innocent, sir, and in doing so lay hands upon the guilty one."

"Well, you have mysterious ways in doing your work, but as you always win your case, Dick, I will say nothing against your methods and give you all the help I can."

"I well know that, chief, and let me thank you in sending me so good an assistant as you have in Doherty."

"Yes, Jack Doherty is one of my very best men, and he knows what he is about, being nervy, cool, and brainy, while he is devoted to his profession."

"He is all that, sir, and he goes with me to-night on a mission, and I would like to ask if you will have half a dozen men within call of this address, sir, at twelve o'clock."

The chief took the address and reading it said:

"Yes, the men will be within call of your signal, Dick; but this is a dangerous locality at night."

"I can well believe that, sir."

"Now, Dick, just what have you unearthed in this mystery?" said the chief with deep interest.

"Simply, sir, that the youth who rescued me from the toughs the other night, and who is leader of the River Rats gang, is in some way connected with the murder of the coachman at the Marlborough Mansion."

"Yes."

"If so he knows about the killing of Giant Jack."

"Yes, very true."

"And knowing this he must know the motive for the killing of the girl Estelle Enders."

"I see; but you will believe that she was murdered."

"I know it, chief."

"You are positive, indeed, Dick."

"Have you forgotten that on the very night she is supposed to have taken her life, you received a letter from me?"

"What?"

"Did you not, early in the morning, receive from the Leland Hotel a letter from me?"

"I did not."

"Why, chief, I wrote you just after dawn to the effect that I had been standing out upon the pier and heard a cry in a woman's voice out upon the lake."

"It was a faint cry, some distance off, and it called for help."

"Then all was silent and I waited until dawn hoping the boat would come ashore."

"But none came, and I went to the hotel, wrote you of what I had heard, and sent the letter by a messenger, for I had to catch an early train for New York."

"Dick, I never received that letter."

"It was sent by a messenger, sir, or rather a youth whom I caught on the fly, and to make sure of his taking it I told him to collect the money from you."

"I will investigate," and the chief rang the bell for the watchman.

By referring to his reports he found the name of the man on duty at that date and hour, and so sent for him, while Dick Doom continued:

"When I reached Buffalo the next morning I got a paper on the train which gave an account of the suicide of Estelle Enders, and I at once connected her death with the cry for help the night before, but I forgot it all until I received your telegram to come here, and then the dates brought it all back."

"Now that girl was murdered that night in a boat out upon the lake, and it was her cry for help that I heard."

"Dick, I now begin to feel that you are right, that she did not commit suicide," and just then the watchman appeared.

But he could tell nothing of any letter having been received that had not been put upon the chief's desk, and he added:

"I would have remembered it, sir, from the fact that I would have had to pay the messenger, and I did not do so."

"No, sir, no letter came for you that morning except by mail, while I was on watch."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE RAID OF THE DETECTIVES.

It was just twelve o'clock when Dick Doom and John Doherty arrived in front of the building in which Nick Norcross and Peter Pepper had their home.

They went quickly up the high steps to the front door, and Dick Doom took a bunch of keys from his pocket and readily unlocked it.

Entering the hallway they found all still there, and Detective Doherty had explained that the Italian and his wife had their room in the rear, as he had noted when visiting the house.

The same key then unlocked the door upon the right, and they found themselves in Nick's upper room.

It was not lighted save from the open trap-door, there being a light in the room below.

Noiselessly crossing the room Dick Doom glanced down through the trap-door, which had been left open.

He saw that the basement room was more comfortable in every respect than the one they were in, and there upon his bed, fast asleep, lay a youth, while a lamp burned in the fireplace.

Beckoning to Detective Doherty to follow him, Dick Doom went below without making the slightest noise.

Another bed there held no occupant.

It was the bed of Nick, who was then behind iron bars.

The two detectives stood by the side of the sleeping youth and Doherty whispered:

"It is the one who was fishing with the young one I jugged."

"And the one who came with him to my rescue when I was set upon," answered Dick Doom half aloud.

The voice caused the sleeper to move and ask in drowsy tones:

"Is that you, Nick?"

"No, but I want you."

Pete Pepper was awake in an instant now and with a cry sat up and gazed at the two detectives.

"Who is yer?" he gasped.

"Who are you?"

"None o' yer bizziness—Lordy, you is ther old guy from Wayback we kept from being eat up by ther toughs, hain't yer?"

"Yes."

"Did yer come in with Nick?"

"No."

"How did yer git in then?"

"Unlocked your doors and came in."

"Is yer on ther steal?"

"No."

"Yer is in luck for yer won't git nothin' here."

"I differ with you."

"What'll you git?"

"Quite a haul."

"You can't git blood out o' a turnip, old Country."

"I'll tell you what I came for?"

"What?"

"To run you in."

"What has I done?"

"The charge against you is murder."

"Lordy, old man, you are away off, for you kilt that tough one before we come up."

"I do not refer to that man."

"Who then?"

"Another?"

Pete laughed and said:

"If that's yer charge jist yank me off to ther lock-up, for yer hev got ter find ther body, and as I hain't never kilt nobody yer can't do it."

The eyes of Dick Doom were reading the face of the youth with a look that was intense, but he said abruptly:

"How about Mr. Marlborough's coachman?"

"You is away off there, for I never seen him in my life."

"Do you know Giant Jack?"

"Lordy! that big duffer as—"

Pete paused and Dick Doom said quietly:

"Well, finish your sentence."

"I hain't got no more to say."

"You knew that Giant Jack was dead?"

"Didn't I see—"

Again he paused and Dick Doom turned to his companion and said:

"Mr. Doherty, put the bracelets on this young gentleman, please."

Pete gave a sigh and turned pale, but made no resistance, but held out his hands and Doherty slipped on the irons in a way that showed he had had much practice in that direction.

Then Pete was told to get out of bed, and the detective aided him to dress, while Dick Doom began a systematic search of the room.

He searched everywhere, and with a skill that showed the expert, looking in unsuspected places, and placing all that he found worth taking charge of in a pile on the floor.

Going to the room above, he searched that also, and making up a bundle of his findings, he took up the lamp, and telling Detective Doherty to follow with his prisoner, he went to the room above.

There he put out the lamp, and they passed silently out into the hall and left the house without having disturbed the other inmates.

"I'll give the signal for my men in waiting, Doherty, and when they come, go with

them and the prisoner to the jail, and commit this young gentleman."

"Do not let the other one know of his capture, nor tell this one of Nick's being a prisoner," and he whispered the last words to Detective Doherty.

The signal was then given, and at a double-quick a sergeant and four men came in sight just as Dick Doom shouldered his bundle and walked away toward his hotel.

Half an hour after, Pete Pepper found himself a prisoner behind iron bars, but little dreamed that Nick Norcross was not far away.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TRAPPING THE RIVER RATS.

DICK DOOM had set to work in earnest to solve the mystery hanging over the death of Estelle Enders, and connecting with it Nick Norcross and his band.

As he could not bring himself to believe, in spite of the circumstantial evidence of his guilt, that the youth was in any way guilty of the crime of even being an accomplice in the murder, he was determined to prove that he was innocent.

To do this also was, he felt, his duty, for he owed his life to Nick Norcross.

He had caused the arrest of Pete Pepper for a reason that will be revealed later, and having laid his plans in his own mind, he set about carrying them out with dispatch in his usual way.

His plan was to get each one of the River Rats in custody, and to do this he asked for a detail of some thirty men.

At the head of these John Doherty was placed, and he had orders to put these detectives on the trail of the River Rats, hunting down each one of the band.

The police knew one and all of these youths, and was always on the alert to find out just what they were doing, and the detectives were informed of the whereabouts of those who comprised the band.

"Once I get them all into my custody, I can find out much that I wish to know, and as each one will be imprisoned separately, that will give me a chance to hear their stories apart," mused Dick Doom after Detective Doherty had started upon his mission.

While the detectives were on the search of the River Rats still at large, Dick Doom decided to see what he could find out from Nick Norcross and Pete Pepper already in his power.

He went to the cell of the latter last, and being admitted by the keeper found Pete lying upon his cot and looking very disconsolate.

But the youth braced up as the detective entered and said:

"Well, old gent from Wayback, this is where you put me for helping you out the other night?"

"Yes, and I put you here for a purpose, Pepper."

"To send us to Joliet, I suppose."

"Not if you can keep out."

"I'm already in, so how kin I help myself?"

"I'll tell you."

"That's a go."

"I happen to know that you belong to a band of youths, thirteen in number and known to the police as River Rats."

"Waal, what o' that so long as we is honest and breaks no laws?"

"But are you honest and not law-breakers?"

"If you think we hain't, just prove us guilty and you wins."

"Your captain is named Nick Norcross?"

"You found that out by getting the papers in our room."

"I found out more."

"What else?"

"I know that Norcross is well born, and

that he was stolen from his parents in his younger years."

"How does yer know it, old gent?"

"From papers I found among his belongings."

"Waal, he never told me anything about that; but I does know he be a born gent, and he's squar' and nervy clear through."

"What was your band formed for?"

"That's a secret."

"You mean that you will not tell?"

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"I'm under oath not ter."

"But you confess you are banded together for some purpose?"

"Yas."

"How much do you wish for the information I desire from you?"

"See here, old Wayback, I hain't for sale."

"You have your price?"

"I hain't got no price to sell out my pards, and you is barkin' up ther wrong tree if you thinks so."

"Then you will have to go to prison."

"On what charge?"

"Several."

"Waal, I'll stay thar until I sarves my time, I guess."

"You refuse to tell?"

"I does."

"How about saving a pal if he is in trouble?"

"How?"

"Suppose I tell you that I have Nick Norcross in my power."

"It hain't a fact."

"It is."

"If you has, then he is in same as me, from a suspicion."

"And he will have to suffer."

"Guess he can suffer well as I do, and if we goes to Joliet, when we comes out we'll start in business again together," was Pete Pepper's philosophical response.

In several ways Dick Doom sought to get some information from Pete, but the boy was as close as a clam, and save admitting that he belonged to the band of River Rats he would say no more.

Thus passed several days when Detective Doherty, who had reported daily the capture of several of the River Rats, came to the hotel to notify Dick Doom of the capture of all of the band of young waifs.

"You have them all then, Doherty?"

"Yes, sir, and a lot of eels they were to catch; but they are all jugged."

"In separate cells?"

"Yes, sir."

"And do they know of each others' capture?"

"Several do who were caught together, sir; but the others do not suspect the capture of the rest," was the reply of the detective.

CHAPTER XXV.

PUT TO THE TEST.

DICK DOOM had not been idle while Detective Doherty was upon the track of the River Rats.

He had gone several times to the Marlborough Mansion and held long talks with the servants, and he had, in one disguise after another, gone about the city seeing what he could discover that would be useful to him.

In these still-hunts he had unearthed a number of cases of crime that had defied the detection of the police and rendered valuable services to the chief.

"This is certainly a city of crooks," he would say to himself time and again as he visited the most dangerous localities of the town.

He went at once to the jail where Detective Doherty reported that the last one of the band of River Rats had been captured.

Going to the chief's private office he said: "Chief, I wish you to send for those young River Rats one at a time to come here, and I will question them."

"Here are their names, as I wish them called, and I desire you to hear what they have to say."

The chief at once gave the orders for the River Rats to be brought before him in the order named by Dick Doom.

The first to appear was a carmine-headed youth known as Bricktop, and with a face as freckled as a turkey egg.

He had a shrewd look in his small eyes and was not in the least abashed when brought into the presence of the chief and Dick Doom, who was still in his disguise as an Indiana countryman.

"Your name is—"

"Bricktop."

"You have another name?"

"If I has I don't remember it, for I has been called Bricktop since I were a little kid."

"Where are your parents?"

"Hain't got none."

"They are dead?"

"Yes, they went down in a wreck on the lake, and the captain of a schooner saved me, but treated me so bad I skipped and took ter boot-blackin'."

"That's all I is."

"You are a member of the River Rats?"

"Who says so?"

"I do."

"Well then I guess you knows."

"I do, and more, so tell me the truth."

"I hain't goin' ter tell nothing."

"I am sorry, for I was in hopes you wanted to save your captain from trouble."

"What cap'n?"

"Nick Norcross."

Bricktop started at this and asked eagerly:

"Has yer got him?"

"Yes; and every member of your band."

"Whew!"

"Now, Norcross has a serious charge against him and I was in hopes you could save him."

"How kin I?"

"By telling the truth."

"About what?"

"Your band."

"Thar hain't nothin' ter tell more than we has a club, like fashionable folks has, and meets where we can, for the police is onter us and always thinks we is up to some deviltry."

"Which you are not?"

"We hain't angels, maybe, but we hain't devils, neither."

"If you could save your captain by telling the truth would you?"

"Save him from what?"

"The gallows."

Dick Doom spoke with deep and solemn emphasis and Bricktop turned deadly pale, but was silent.

"Answer me."

"If I know'd Nick had got inter any hangin' trouble and I could save him, I'd talk, maybe; but, it would have to be after he had been tried and sentenced ter death, see?"

"That is an admission that you could save him if you wished to."

"Maybe," was the laconic response.

Dick Doom said no more but led the youth back to the guard at the door and gave him another name to fetch in.

"Well, Dick, that fellow is as cunning as a fox," said the chief.

"He is, indeed, sir, shrewd and clever, and the dreaded hanging of Norcross is about the only thing that will make him talk."

"We will find better material to work among the others."

"I am not so sure of that."

"There are thirteen of them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Among so many there is certainly a black sheep, or in other words a traitor."

"I do not believe it, sir, except to save their young captain," was Dick Doom's reply, and just then a second one of the band of River Rats entered the room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FOILED.

THE next one of the River Rats to be brought before the Secret Service chief and Dick Doom, was a wiry youth of sixteen, who had a strong face and pleasant manner about him.

"Your name is Denny, I believe?" said Dick Doom.

"Yes, sir."

"You are one of the River Rats gang?"

"Yes."

"What is the motive of your being banded together?"

"Fun, and general interest, and to make money:

"By crime?"

"We are suspected of committing crime, and the police hound us continually, but why don't they catch us breaking the law, if we are as bad as they say?"

"Well, every one of your band are now in jail—"

"All in jail, sir?" cried the youth excitedly.

"Yes."

"Is Nick Norcross?"

"Yes, your leader."

"And Pete Pepper?"

"Yes."

"Then I guess the gang is done up."

"Well, you can go free and get money besides by telling the truth about your band."

"I don't know nothing to tell."

"If you did you would not tell?"

"That's about the size of it, sir."

"Well, name your price for what you will tell?"

"Not a penny."

"You may perhaps save Nick Norcross from being hanged."

"Lordy! is it so bad as that?"

"It is."

"I'll have to know that for sure before I would give anything away even to save his neck, and there is no one I likes as I do Nick."

"Could you save him by what you would confess?"

"I don't know, for the law hangs many an innocent man," was the prompt reply.

After a few questions more, all of which the youth parried most skillfully, the detective sent him back to his cell and Number Three was sent for.

He was a dull-looking lad, but was clever enough to keep the secret of the River Rats being banded together, and nothing more was found out from him than from the other two.

Number Four was a handsome lad, the youngest in the band, and he said that he sold flowers for a living but put it in the River Rats' till.

He was annoyed to know that all the band were in limbo, but could say nothing to get them out, or would not.

As had the others said, he might be bribed by Nick Norcross's danger of being hanged, to say what he could to save him, but no money, or threats of personal imprisonment could tempt him, and he was sent back to his cell.

So it went on, one after the other being sent for until in Number Twelve came Pete Pepper.

He was not to be bribed, or frightened by threats, and so was sent back to his cell.

Number Thirteen was Nick Norcross, and he bowed to the detective and then to the chief.

"Well, Norcross, this is a bad business you have gotten yourself into," said Dick Doom.

"Yes, sir, it is."

"Why do you not come out squarely and make a clean breast of it all?"

"Of what sir?"

"The killing of Mr. Marlborough's coachman?"

"I am not at liberty to do so, sir."

"Why not?"

"It is not my secret."

"It is a crime which you will be accused of."

"I am innocent of the charge, sir."

"Can you prove that?"

"No, sir, I fear that I cannot."

"Why can you not?"

"Well, sir, it would harm others as well as myself."

"And you will not betray them?"

"No, no, never."

"You will be the one to suffer if you do not."

"I must suffer then."

"Will you not let others talk then to clear you?"

"No one else can."

"Your band."

"Ah! the River Rats, sir?"

"Yes."

"They can do nothing, sir, even if you knew where to find them."

"I do know."

Nick Norcross smiled incredulously and said:

"Where, sir?"

"In this jail."

"I don't understand you, sir," faltered the youth.

"Let me explain by telling you that every one of your gang are prisoners in this jail now."

"I do not wish to doubt you, sir, but I can hardly believe that."

"I'll read you their names, the occupation given by each one, their ages and general appearance," and taking up the book on the desk Dick Doom read slowly each name and description given.

"I am awful sorry, sir."

"Well, now, you do not wish all of these comrades of yours sent to prison do you?"

"No, sir."

"Then confess what the motive of your band is, and all about them, and you shall see them set free, though of course you must be held until the charges against you are disproved."

"I have nothing to confess, sir."

"You are determined to abide by this decision?"

"I am, sir."

"All right, Norcross, I fear you are simply putting the noose of the hangman about your neck," said the chief with a show of anger, speaking for the first time.

But Nick made no reply, showed no emotion.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE TRAP.

DICK DOOM was disappointed greatly, at the outcome of his interview with each one of the River Rats and lastly their chief, Nick Norcross.

They had refused bribes, disregarded threats and stood together firmly.

No entreaties could move them, and each one had passed through the ordeal, convincing both the chief and Dick Doom that they had a secret all their own, but yet would not reveal it unless perhaps to save their young leader from the hangman, for the hint that such might be his fate had caused all of them to grow anxious and nervous.

The plan to get the confession from them failing, Dick Doom said:

"Well, chief, what do you think of these youngsters?"

"I am the more convinced that they are a gang of arrant scamps, and have become so mixed up in crime that wild horses could not drag their secret from them."

"Well, I shall try another plan, tomorrow."

"What is that?"

"I shall set a trap for them by simply making known to each one separately that Nick Norcross is accused of murdering Estelle Enders, and then killed the coachman when he was at the mansion stealing the boat, to hide his crime, and that he was in league with Giant Jack the convict."

"You think that they will fall into that trap?"

"I do, sir."

"Why?"

"From their love of their leader."

"It is a great idea, and it may make them talk, so it is worth the trial, Dick," answered the chief.

Having formed his plan Dick Doom carried it out in his own way.

He went to the cell of Pete Pepper first on the second day after the interview with the River Rats in the private office of the chief.

He went in with a very serious face and taking a seat upon the cot said:

"See here, my boy, I have come to have a talk with you, and I wish you to appreciate just how grave is the situation."

"Yes, sir," and Pete was certainly impressed by the words and manner of Dick Doom.

He had begun to feel all the horrors of prison life, and miss the sunshine and freedom without.

"It is not you that are in trouble, Pete, for the chances are that in time you will go free."

"Who then, sir?"

"Your good friend Norcross."

"What has he done?"

"I'll tell you just what he is charged with, and you can realize his full danger."

"Yes, sir, please do."

"You know that a young girl was found in a boat dead, on the shore of the Marlborough grounds some time ago?"

"Yes, sir, I know."

"Well, it was published that she took her own life, and it has so far not been proved to the contrary, except that I doubt her being a suicide."

"That's what Nick said, sir."

"Well, the charge is that he knows."

"Nick knows?"

"Yes, for it is said that he killed her, or was an accomplice, and that he went with Giant Jack to steal the boat her body was found in, that he might cover up the murder, which something about the craft might reveal, and being discovered he killed the coachman."

"It's a lie, sir, it's a mean lie!" cried Pete Pepper excitedly.

"What is a lie, Pete?"

"That he would harm that beautiful lady who had been so good to him."

"Why, I saw Nick when he read the notice of her death, and he cried about it."

"How had she been good to him, Pete?"

"Why, Mr. Richardson," said Pete earnestly, calling the great detective by the name he went by in his disguise:

"Nick pulled a child out of the way, saved it from being run over, but fell himself and the truck broke his leg."

"That lady saw the act, took him in a carriage and drove to the hospital and left him there, giving the doctors money to care for him."

"And she sent him fruit and flowers, and then went away he never knew where."

"The next he heard of her was when he read me of the story of her death in the papers."

"The doctor can tell you this, sir, and her death broke Nick all up."

"No, no, he has been trying to find out about her history ever since, and to track down the man who killed her, for Nick swears she never took her own life."

"This is your story of your friend, Pete, and without proof."

"I fear it will do Nick no good, and I want you to understand that I am working to save him, for I owe him my life, as you know."

After a moment of silence Pete said impressively:

"See here, I'm going to give it all to you straight as a string."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PETE PEPPER'S CONFESSION.

PETE had lost his cheeky, impudent manner now, for he had really begun to see that his friend was in great danger.

He was excited now and wore an anxious look, while the detective was perfectly calm.

"Well, Pete, I am glad you have decided to tell the truth, for it will save your chum."

"Then I'll do it if I hang for it."

"You see, old gent, Nick saved my life once and I'm tied to him tight in friendship, though he is of a different kind from me."

"We has been pals fer nearly two years, and though I were once a very bad boy he made me see my wicked ways, and he hain't no preacher neither."

"We pooled our money and got along prime, and I had to cut my old pals."

"But they all liked Nick, and begun to come round to see us, and he got them to live honest, too, and so our gang was formed."

"Not for crime then?"

"You bet it wasn't with Nick the cap'n."

"No, he made us take different kinds of work, and we all chipped in our earnings and he was made treasurer."

"Well, one day one of our gang was arrested and he is now in Joliet, serving his time for picking pockets, and he was no more guilty than you, for he was out on the lake fishing when the man was robbed."

"But the fellow swore he was the one, and as he'd had paid him our week's money, to send to Nick, and sixty dollars was found on him, that settled it, and up he went."

"Our testimony was no good, for the police said we was a gang of thieves."

"This made Nick mad, and he said it was hard, when one was not guilty, to be sent to jail, and when we were all trying to live honest to be called thieves and toughs."

"So he said as how we would make up a band of ferrets."

"Of ferrets?"

"Yes, old gent, Secret Service boys, and see if we could not run down game the police could not."

"We begun to shadow the crooks, and I tell you we helped get back stolen property many a time, only we did not dare let the police know we had helped, and Nick, in disguise, would do the work, and we got some good rewards, I can tell you, and our treasury has got a clean thousand in it now."

"Go on, Pete, for your story interests me."

"Well, sir, we found out new and then a policeman or detective who was crooked, would take bribes, and do other mean actions, and Nick kept a record of them."

"Why, the cops used to nab us just to get money from us, for we'd pay to get away, you kin bet."

"I see."

"Well, when we seen the story of that lady killing herself, Nick tried to find out something about her, and he and me went to see her buried, and we put some flowers on her grave."

"But he vowed she had been killed, and we had a meeting of our gang and he set us to work to find out all we could about her."

"Our gang is tied by the solemnest oaths not to betray any secret, and none of us has,

but when it comes to Nick being hanged, you bet oaths hain't in it a little bit.

"Now let me tell you that Nick had an idea that if he got that boat, he could find out the maker of it, and who it had been sold to."

"So up he goes to the Marlborough Mansion and gives some money to the coachman, and he shows him round and he takes in the situation."

"That night the boys went to a certain place to meet us, and Nick and me went up after the boat."

"The only way we could get it was to steal it, and Nick said that was all right if we could get good out of it."

"We rowed up then in our own boat, anchored it, and stripping off our duds swam ashore."

"We found the boat had been moved further up on the lawn, and we were in the lake when we seen a man at the boat."

"He was a big fellow and we seen he was stealing it, and doing our work for us."

"He got the boat into the lake and then went for the oars, and we heard a man's cry over in the stable."

"Then the big man come running out and Nick said he would bag him and we showed ourselves."

"Lord, but he was mad, and whipping out a knife he ran upon Nick saying he would kill him."

"But Nick brought the oar down on his head and that settled him."

"Then we got into the boat and rowed away and hid it."

"That's the story, old gent, and you can't make Nick guilty of murder out of that."

CHAPTER XXIX.

ON THE RIGHT TRACK.

HAVING made his confession, told his story, as it were, Pete Pepper relapsed into silence, his face wearing a look of defiance.

When he had concluded Dick Doom after a moment of silence said:

"Pete, you have acted very wisely in telling me the truth."

"I have felt sure that Nick Norcross was not guilty, and I was determined to prove him so."

"Now I know who killed the coachman, and can account for Giant Jack's death, and Nick acted in self-defense."

"Giant Jack went there for a greater purpose than to merely steal that boat, for he had some deeper object in view."

"I am the more convinced now that Miss Enders was murdered, and do not believe that it could have been by Giant Jack, for he was very different from what she is represented to have been, and if he did kill her he was paid to do so."

"If he did not, then he was stealing the boat at the instigation of some one."

"Now my plan is to find out who Giant Jack was acting for, and who manufactured the boat."

"When this is done, we can find out to whom the boat was sold."

"Now where is it?"

"Ther boat?"

"Yes."

"I kin take you to it, for I sees you is Nick's friend."

"I'll come for you then at three o'clock," and Dick Doom left the cell.

His next visit was to Bricktop, and in the same way, by speaking of the danger to Nick Norcross and that he could save him, he got the same story from him.

With Detective John Doherty outside of the cell, listening to every word said, Dick Doom went from one to the other of the River Rats, and got from them their version of what their gang had been formed for, and just what Nick had done for them.

The only one who would tell however of the secret they had sworn to keep, of how Nick had killed Giant Jack, was Pete Pepper,

but Dick Doom was certain that they all knew about it, but would not tell on their leader.

Then, after seeing all of the gang, Dick Doom went to the cell of Nick Norcross.

"Let me tell you something, Nick?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am not guessing now, for I know, so tell me just how you killed Giant Jack."

The youth started, but made a clean breast of it, as Pete had done, and without any comment Dick Doom asked:

"Do you know anything about Giant Jack?"

"Yes, sir, I know all about him, for I wished to find out for whom he was acting, when he went to steal that boat, and I was going to tell you what I had discovered when you had me arrested, after those servants recognized me."

"Well, what do you know, for I am working now for you, as well as to find the murderer of Miss Enders."

"I found out, sir, that the boat was made by Seaman & Co., builders, and it was sold to a gentleman who owns a small yacht, and lives mighty fast."

"I also found out that Giant Jack was seen talking to a young man who was well dressed, the day before I struck him."

"Where is this boat now?"

"In the maker's shop, for I took it there the day I was arrested and told him I wanted to leave it there to be fixed up, and the owner would call and see him about it."

"Give me the address."

This Nick did, and Dick Doom asked:

"Are you the only one who knows who the young man is who bought the boat?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give me his address also."

Nick wrote down the name and where the young man was to be found.

Then he said:

"Cheer up, Nick, for I'll have you out of this before very long, mark my words."

Leaving Nick's cell, Dick Doom returned to that of Pete Pepper and said:

"Pete, the boat was removed from the hiding-place, so I will not trouble you to go with me; but I'll promise you that instead all of you will be released from prison very soon."

"Nick too?"

"Oh, yes."

Then Dick Doom went to the chief's quarters and had a long talk with him.

He told him the story as he had heard it from the Boy Ferrets, and then asked:

"Now tell me what you know of Merton Sanford?"

"Well, he is a young highflyer here in town that makes a big show upon what is said to be a small capital, but I hear gambles and wins heavily."

"He has been very dissipated, but is now quite respectable in his behavior as he is said to be engaged to Miss Myrtle Marlborough, who is an heiress to a very large fortune."

"She is now in New York with her parents, and I hate to see her marry that fellow, for it is said he was once secretly married to some actress, though I guess that is a mistake."

"Well, chief, I am going to call upon Mr. Sanford at his rooms this evening, and Doherty will go with me."

"As this is your night in your office until late I may see you again," and as it was growing dark Dick Doom left the chief's quarters, the latter muttering as he departed:

"Dick Doom has struck a fresh trail, that is certain."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE GUILTY ONE.

In pleasant rooms on Twenty-second street, a young man was dressing for dinner at his club, for he was putting on his dress-suit

just as a card was brought in to him by his valet.

He was a man of thirty, with a handsome face marred somewhat by a look of dissipation and an expression that was cynical and not at all winning.

But his manners were courtly, those of a gentleman, though cold and reserved, and he would have been admired in any gathering, while he was just the one to win a woman's love.

"Who the deuce is it, Crump?" he asked his valet.

"He's a hold guy, sir, who says he knew you when you was ha boy, sir," said the English valet.

"I will see him, for I may be entertaining an angel unawares, in fact some old rich duffer who may be looking for an heir."

"Yes, sir, hit may be."

"Now go the stable and order me a carriage, for I am about dressed."

Dick Doom went out and a moment after the young man entered his parlor to find there the one whom the valet had called an old "guy."

"Mr. Merton Sanford, I take it."

"Yes, sir, and who may you be?"

"The father of Estelle Enders."

A cry broke from the lips of Merton Sanford, his face became deadly pale, he reeled and sunk down upon a lounge, while great beads of cold sweat rolled down his face.

"Oh, why did you kill that poor child, man?" cried the old man, advancing toward the lounge.

"Good God! who told you that I killed her?"

"I heard her cry upon the lake for help that night, and know that you murdered her, and then landed upon the Marlborough grounds, with which you are well acquainted, and made your escape."

"I know all, Merton Sanford, all, and—"

With a cry of frenzy, Merton Sanford sprung from the lounge crying:

"Then you know too much, and you, too, shall die!"

But a revolver-muzzle looked into his face, and the words came sternly:

"Hold! out with your hands for my golden fetters, sir, for I am Dick Doom, the detective."

Again the man staggered back, and sinking upon the lounge buried his face in his hands, and a pair of golden fetters was quickly clasped upon his wrists.

"Yes, Merton Sanford, I know that you married secretly the pretty actress Estelle Enders, and then deserted her."

"She came here to seek you, and knowing that she stood between you and your marriage to Miss Myrtle Marlborough, you sought to force her to set you free."

"As she refused you determined to free yourself, and taking her out on the lake on that fatal night, you held a handkerchief saturated with cologne to her nose until she died."

"That is the story, I know, as though I had seen it, and you plotted her death, for you wrote the slip of paper she held in her hand and took it with you."

"You covered up your tracks well, and as she was known by her stage name, Helen Hazleton, no one knew her by the name she took when she came here to find you."

"Now, Merton Sanford, come with me to prison—ho, Doherty!"

Quickly the door leading into the hall, and which was ajar, opened wide and Detective John Doherty entered, a satisfied smile upon his face as he said:

"Well, sir, you did run him to earth the slickest I ever saw."

"Take him to prison, Doherty, and report his capture to the chief, whom ask to return here with you that he may look through this gentleman's effects."

"I'll bring him back soon, sir, soon as I have run this murdering crook in."

"And, Doherty, ask the chief to bring with you Nick Norcross and Pete Pepper, for we owe it to them mostly that we bagged our game."

"Yes, sir, and they should come," said John Doherty, as he led his submissive prisoner from the room.

Detective Doherty had just driven away with his prisoner when Crump the valet returned and was at once seized by Dick Doom, greatly to the alarm of the Englishman.

Within an hour the carriage returned and in it was the chief, Detective Doherty, Nick Norcross and Pete Pepper, all of whom had now heard the story of how Merton Sanford had been entrapped into betraying his guilt.

"Norcross, you are free, and I congratulate you and your comrade Pete upon all that you have done in this Enders murder case, and the chief should certainly attach the River Rats to his Secret Service Bureau," said Dick Doom.

"Egad but I will, for they are well worthy of it and will make splendid ferrets.

"To-morrow, Norcross, we will get you free of this charge against you," said the chief.

"Do so, chief, and then I shall feel content, though I have a duty to perform some day in the behalf of my young rescuer and friend," said Dick Doom.

"And what duty is that, sir?" asked Nick Norcross eagerly.

"Do you know who your parents were?"

"No, sir, I know nothing of my past."

"Then some day I will try and find out for you," was Dick Doom's response.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONCLUSION.

JUST how it happened, no one at Headquarters seemed to know, but when the cell in which Merton Sanford had been placed was opened the next morning, it was found empty.

The iron bars had been filed in two, and passing out into the yard, the clever prisoner had made his escape.

Of course no one was to blame, except that he had not been searched thoroughly before being put into the cell, though with his dress suit on it was not thought necessary, and Detective Doherty had promised to bring other clothing for him when he came back from his rooms.

In the search of Sanford's room nothing was found to criminate him as the murderer of Estelle Enders, the actress, but the papers told the story as it was, and his escape seemed proof positive of his guilt.

In the affair, that the Boy Ferrets might be made useful as such, nothing was said of their good services rendered, and Dick Doom, wishing to remain unknown in the affair, for reasons of his own, Detective John Doherty was given the credit of the splendid Secret Service work, and he deserved much praise for the part he had played in the Chicago chase after the crooks.

Mr. Marlborough at once sailed for Europe with his wife and daughter, the latter, it was said, glad to escape the marriage with Sanford, as it was a match her mother had made.

Of course the mysterious affair created a nine-days' stir, but was then forgotten.

But Dick Doom still continues to shadow the crooks, and promises yet to reveal the secret of the parentage of Nick Norcross, the Boy Ferret, and what the great detective pledges himself to he accomplishes, so let my readers look out for the keeping of the promise made.

THE END.

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